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THE HORSE-LEECH'S DAVGHTERS

By Margaret Doyle Jackson



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The Horse-Leech's Daughters

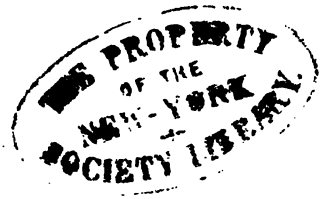
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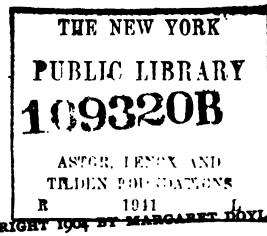
Author of "A Daughter of the Pit"

"The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give — give."— *Proverbs xxx. 15*



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THE
Horse-Leech's Daughters

CHAPTER I

MRS. IRVING CLEWORTH

SHE was petite, smiling, and self-possessed, and of a deceitful languor that masked the singular effectiveness of her least movement. The smile showed to advantage her red well-formed lips and white teeth — she would not have worn it else; and her presence affected one's senses like the rustle of silken petticoats. Her hair hung low and dark and shining over her forehead, and in her eyes was the yellowish sleepy gleam one sees in those of a tiger that has been well fed.

The man who accompanied her needs less description. He was her husband, by the way, though he had somehow more the look of an appendage. Given the floor of the Stock Exchange as a possible setting, one felt instantly that he had resolved into a

type. He was tall, with a strong yet somewhat amorous face, if that which was really only a possibility may be reckoned a feature; and although studiously polite to the small dame he was evidently not wholly at ease.

They had entered a Broadway car just before the noon rush. There was but one vacant seat, and as the lady swept thither the eyes of the men on either side of the car aisle rose from their papers and followed. A meek Italian occupying the adjoining seat eyed her for a moment in dumb admiration. At the next she had turned and commenced to take such leisurely note of him, his old worn clothes, and horny brown hands resting loosely on his knees, that he grew visibly perturbed. Finally she stared him out of the seat, and, with a humble dab at his forelock, he rose and slouched apologetically down the aisle out of her sight. Her husband then sat down.

Satisfied of the relationship of the two, the eyes of the other men went back to their papers. The husband whom his wife's forethought had given a seat perfunctorily un-

folded a paper also, and behind it the pair fell into subdued conversation, conducted in short explicit sentences.

"You might as well do it at once, Irving."

"I tell you, Leone, I cannot do it."

"Oh, yes, you can. I am sure of it."

"I will not, then."

"Will you not? You have many times that with you. I saw it this morning."

"Yes, but I need every dollar of it. I 'm in a tight place just now. I have to meet Westcott to-day and he will drain me to the last penny. Be reasonable. You can wait, for once."

"I can't wait, Irving. I must have the fifty; the other is not my affair."

"You *cannot* have it," said the husband, more irritably.

"Keep your temper, Irving," the smiling lady admonished. "You will give me the fifty before you go."

She turned to look out of the window behind his head, but her eyes were upon his face, and he felt them. Her hand stole unobtrusively into the crook of his elbow and

he raised his paper slightly on the impulse to screen off the general view. A short silence ensued while he endeavored to read; then, embarrassed, he turned and met the yellowish eyes full.

"Don't, Leone, now. Please don't look at me like that. I wish I could — but really — you know I can't."

She smiled a caress into his face. "Yes," she slowly enunciated under her breath, and he returned abruptly to his paper.

Broadway left the great square with its glimpse of green life behind, and narrowed into a gay crowded canyon whereof the walls were theatre entrances, hotels, cafés, and florists' shops. The car began to fill up in the centre, with women shoppers chiefly; but a girl, carrying a milliner's box and dressed in a shabby, spotted tan suit, drifted down with the rest and came to a stand before Leone. Beside the string of the box she clutched also in one hand a paper bearing a written address, and a frayed two dollar bill.

Presently the car stopped to take on more

passengers, and when it started again it did so with such a sudden jolt as to precipitate the girl and the box almost into Leone's face. The lady uttered a low inarticulate sound of annoyance, but the girl recovered herself with a confused apology, and then a movement of the passengers swept her forward.

Despite annoyance, the lady's smile had grown even more amiable than before. Into her yellow-brown eyes — a little wider open, a little more alert than they had been — had sprung a look of genuine pleasure. There was a swift, slight, hardly perceptible movement of one of the small inert-looking hands in her lap, and the man beside her looked down with a start and flushed dark red.

"Leone! For God's sake, are you mad?"

"Mad?" she turned to him slowly; "why, Irving?"

"How dare you do that?"

"Do what?"

"That! I saw you."

"You did? Ah" — she laughed very softly — "well?"

"Well? You are raving. Return it to the girl immediately!"

She laughed again, as at some passing pleasantry of his, and looked behind him out of the window.

"Naturally not," she murmured musically; "I need it."

"You need two dollars? Preposterous, Leone."

"I do, Irving. Your parsimony drives me to expedients. I absolutely must have money."

For twenty seconds or so he sat bereft of speech. Then a slight commotion commenced in the forward end of the car. The girl with the milliner's box began to look about her anxiously.

"Leone, for Heaven's sake, don't carry the joke any further," he whispered. "You 'll be discovered. The poor thing has missed it and she 's going to make a fuss. Do be prudent, I beg of you."

She glanced at the flashing equipages on the thoroughfare without and slightly raised her voice. "Such lovely weather! We shall

have a perfect season. If only one had oceans of money how enjoyable life would be." Her voice dropped. "Refund it yourself if you feel that way, Irve. It 's only two dollars, and you can afford it. I cannot."

"*Damnation!* And know you for a thief? I 'll not endure it. Another moment, Leone, and I 'll expose you, I swear."

"Do, Irving — oh, do," she said gently, and laughed fearlessly into his eyes.

He ground his teeth; his face was paler now. "I 'll give you the fifty, you little leech, if you 'll do it."

"No; a hundred now," she rejoined swiftly, "on account of the pretty name you called me."

He started. "Leone — mercy. It 's utterly impossible to-day. To-morrow — I promise."

"No, Irving, to-day. *Now*," she breathed. Her face still retained all its soft charm, but between the full red lines of her lips the teeth seemed somehow to gleam.

He stared at her, fascinated for a moment by her beauty and cruelty. Then he drew

out his wallet. "Give; give. Will you never have done? You would draw blood from a mummy, Leone, if he had the misfortune to love you," he groaned between his teeth. He handed her the money and she took it with a well-bred murmur of thanks.

Then followed a graceful leisurely upheaval of rich fabrics, a flash of spangled silk, and the dull sweep of furs — and she had risen to her small height and was leaning toward the girl in the soiled tan suit, and extending the two dollar bill. Those around made way.

"Pardon me," she murmured sweetly, "but I think you must have dropped this a few moments ago. Isn't it yours?" An angel from heaven would have looked less lovely and beneficent than she.

Then she dropped back into her seat, followed by admiring glances. Presently, at sight of her husband's impassive yet outraged face she was constrained to mirth. Her laugh was low and musical in its note of utter satisfaction.

"To think that you suspected me of de-

signs on a dirty two dollar bill, Irve. Ha, ha — And *you* call yourself a poker player? I was scared every minute that you 'd call my bluff. Oh, if it had only been a thousand now, instead of a dirty little deuce!"

The man's turn to look out of the window had come, and he looked steadfastly.

Soon the car approached his destination.

"You must get off here, I suppose? Sorry," she resumed softly. "So liberal of you, Irve; I can never thank you enough." Her hand was in the hollow of his elbow again.

"Leone, you 'll be the ruin of me," he muttered drearily.

"Oh." Again she laughed, so infectiously that his face softened. "Ruin? You 're the most amusing — By the way, come up town again if you can after you 've finished with — with that Westcott man, you know. I have tickets to see Du Barry, and I 'd rather have you with me than any one else."

The car wheels commenced to grind warningly, and he rose with a movement as near a fling as politeness and his admiration

of her would allow. She watched him from the window, picking his way through the sunlit mob of vehicles and pedestrians, his air of vexed determination seeming to afford her deep amused satisfaction. At the curb, however, he glanced momentarily backward and raised his paper in a swift sign of farewell; mollified annoyance and returning fealty to herself were in the gesture, and Leone turned inward, content. She had been confident that that last shaft of hers would not miscarry.

Some one had slipped immediately into the vacant seat, but Leone had had no leisure as yet for observation. Now a clear contralto voice smote her ears pleasantly.

"Ah," the voice laughed, "I have discovered you in the act. My dear, don't you know it's the worst form to flirt in public, and with one's own husband?"

"Why, Belle! You? Where have you come from? I did n't notice you get on."

"Naturally. You were noticing those who alighted." Both laughed — Leone as though in reminiscence.

"Well, Irve is such a dear," she said, purring.

"That settles it," the new-comer drawled appreciatively. "I 'm certain now he 's been giving you money. Confess! I knew it the minute I saw you. You do look so like a gratified pussy cat, Leone, with those yellow eyes of yours."

"A what? Really!" The yellow eyes plainly showed that they did not relish the comparison, but these two were bosom friends and it was allowed to pass. "You think I 'm mercenary, Belle, but I 'm not. I 'm not one of those who love a man for his money."

"Oh, my dear! did I say so? You love the two together, of course, as I hope to do some day. One needs both to be truly happy, but one would n't think of discriminating against either unless one were abominably mercenary — or foolish."

Leone was silent for a moment while the exact meaning of this sank in; then her smiling self-possession assumed an air of prim matronly disapproval. "I have never

reduced my ideas down to any such cold formula. One naturally must have money if one is to live. You always were too outspoken, Belle. Take a married woman's advice: the opportunity for such discrimination has not yet come your way, my dear, and unless you can be less brutally frank I fear it never will."

"Oh, my!" laughed Belle irreverently; "all because I called you a pussy cat. Oh, yes, I know — you need n't remind me. You 're six months older than I, and you 're married. Doubtless matrimony will make me discreet likewise when it comes. Meantime I have no motive. Why, where are we? Oh, I must get off here, Leone. Where are you going?"

"Here also. Come and lunch with me, Belle. A girl with your propensity to talk needs a chaperone. You 'll meet Clara Manning, and perhaps her German fiancé. I 've never met him myself, but Clara said he 'd be down in this neighborhood on business, and I told her to bring him in if she could. He 's interested in her charities, you know

— rather a good young man, I imagine. It 's a love match, people say, Bella, if ever there was one."

They stepped from the car, and heedless, tolerant, vociferous Broadway swept them up and immediately assimilated them. Leone and the too-frank Miss Belle Werner resolved at once into harmonious component parts, of which the whole was the great street itself — wealthy, sparkling, cynical. Poverty and misery draw back from Broadway. The setting it affords is not sympathetic.

"Poor Clara! it 's lucky for her, is n't it, that her affinities drew her in such a desirable direction? She has n't enough to dress on herself, and they say the gentleman had n't either until quite lately. Here 's a funny thing, Leone: after a man happens to get a little money do you ever hear any more talk about *his* affinities? now do you ever?"

The chaperone laughed musically. "My dear Bella! perhaps affinities are not so necessary in that case; or perhaps they are

overlooked. I suppose the poor man has them just the same, though. Here we are at Pelton's. Hush! I see Clara, and her German is with her."

CHAPTER II

AN ENCOUNTER ON BROADWAY

To explain who Clara Manning was it will be necessary to retrogress a little. Once upon a time, about a year previous to this day, these two bosom friends whom we met in the last chapter foregathered in a hansom cab. It was early afternoon, and Belle, coming afoot up Broadway after a ruinous morning spent in the shops, had met the hansom cab, in which was Leone, coming down. There was a short halt by the sidewalk, the result of which was that Belle, after protesting that it was an impossibility, — that she was completely tired out and could not think of doing such a thing, — ended by entering the vehicle and turning round downtown again with her friend.

" I've spent all my money," she said, " and it won't be very entertaining to me to watch

you buying everything for yourself. I 'll be sure to set my heart on something I can't have. When I see things I 'm just dying to possess laid deliberately under my eyes and know I can't have them — Leone, I actually suffer."

" You 're selfish, Bella," said Leone calmly — " selfish and culpably extravagant. You think too much about money. You spend more money than I do, and I 'm a married woman, with expenses you can't even dream of. It will be good training in self-denial for you to come with me. Besides, I really must have your advice when I choose that brown silk."

Belle laughed unbelievingly. " As if you could n't detect the becomingness of it faster than any woman in New York — and oh, my dear! as if any one ever dreamed of coming to you for a lesson in self-denial or economy, of all things."

Leone's slightly perturbed looks betrayed that she lacked defense to this. After a moment she returned to the first issue.

" There 's no necessity, surely, for your

going without anything you want merely because you have n't cash enough with you. Open a charge account; that is what they are for. Any store in the city would be glad to open one with Mr. Thompson Werner, I 'm sure."

"Oh, undoubtedly. Only Poppa happens to be balky about it. It is the one thing in creation I can't beg, coax, or drive him to do. He 's an exemplary parent in other respects, but he says he 's thoroughly satisfied with the troubles Providence has allotted him in this vale of tears, and he is n't going to open any charge accounts. He can't help it. It 's a phase of his character. I 'm on my solemn honor not to buy even a shoe-tie unless I can pay for it."

"My dear, he 's intimately acquainted with you — still it must be inconvenient for you at times," said Leone dryly. Suddenly with a gasp and a stifled scream she stopped, and Belle's figure stiffened in the seat, bent forward, shrunk together unconsciously in terror and pity. A dozen men had sprung to the horse's head, forcing him back on his

haunches — sideways — any way — to keep his iron hoofs from descending on the body of a woman who had somehow fallen directly beneath them.

Strong willing hands swiftly raised her and drew her to safety, dust-covered, white, and trembling, but as if by a miracle quite unhurt. It took only a twinkling for Belle to recover.

"Oh, they 've got her, thank Heaven. She 's a poor little creature, Leone; we 'll have to give her something — a good big bill. You 'll have to do it, that is. I 've only — *mercy*, I 've only eighty cents."

Leone eyed her friend with a yellow iceberg in each eye; she had been recovering her self-possession rapidly without the aid of this restorative. "Don't be so excited, Bella," she admonished as the cab drew to the curb and they alighted.

The commercial gleam still lingered, but in an abated degree, as they reached the dust-soiled, shaking figure on the sidewalk. It proved to be that of a tall girl, about twenty-three years old, rather younger than

either of themselves. Belle comprised in an experienced glance the garments underneath the dust — not as to their texture, but as to a certain fine simple distinction in the way they were worn — and instantly fell to flapping the dirt away with the long rich ends of her fur boa. It quite slipped her mind that she had ever spoken about money. By this time the cabman was earnestly explaining to a policeman how it had happened, and how clear it was that he was not to be blamed.

The young girl interceded for him.

"No, it was not his fault. It was mine, if any one's. I did not see him coming," she acknowledged faintly. And Leone came forward, smiling, and saying in her clear voice: —

"Yes, I think you must really have been a little careless; but we 're very sorry for you. We 're very grateful that we did not injure you, however, or kill you outright. Won't you let me give you this as a sign of it?" She extended a five dollar bill with the air of a goddess, but the dusty young lady only

colored faintly at sight of it, and waving it away, commenced to fumble nervously for something.

"Oh, no, thanks! I appreciate your kind intentions, but you 're making a mistake. I have my card with me — yes, here it is."

Strangely, however, she handed it not to Leone, but to Belle. And that young lady instantly responded with pretty aplomb, "Oh, yes; thank you. Miss Manning — my friend, Mrs. Irving Cleworth, and myself, Miss Belle Werner, are both extremely sorry — for everything. You 'll let us take you home, won't you? or wherever you were going? You should not be alone at present, you know."

"Yes, do come; we shall be pleased," Leone urged with fainter cordiality. And chiefly to escape at once from the notoriety and unpleasantness Clara acceded. It was thus that the acquaintance of the three had begun.

Three in a hansom-cab is a considerable crowd, but can be borne upon necessity. It developed during the drive, which was quite

short, that Miss Manning was the daughter of a family well known to society of a few years previous. Reverses had driven the family into retirement, however, and the head of it had shortly afterwards died. By certain names and social events to which she alluded, Leone and Belle identified the young lady instantly, and in the discovery of several mutual friends constraint was relieved. Miss Manning did not admit that she was poor, but the eyes of those two worldlings had long ago discovered it. And presently a damaged parcel which she held jealously in one hand worked itself loose and spread its contents on Belle's knee. It was a piece of fine lace, beautifully worked.

Clara blushed as she gathered it up.

"It is my work; I make it," she said simply to Belle. "I have to do that now for my pin money, and I am interested in one or two little charities also, and that is how I get the money for them."

She had light but pretty blue eyes, and that peculiar timidity of manner which belongs to nothing else but sensitive poverty,

ever feeling itself at a disadvantage. It was noticeable that she did not often address Leone. Evidently she had not forgiven her the tender of that five dollar bill; or perhaps it was a natural animosity, existing even then between them and waiting to be blown into flame by later events. Should those events ever bring their two wills into direct opposition, however, it was a pitifully simple matter to predict which of them would be the winner.

This was Miss Clara Manning. After a year's acquaintance with her, Leone and Belle did not know her much better, for she was of a retiring, diffident nature, that did not greatly attract the sympathies of either. But she had lately become engaged; and now they were on their way to Pelton's, where she and her fiancé, if he would only consent to be brought, were to be Leone's guests at an informal shopping lunch.

CHAPTER III

THAT TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS

ENTERING from Broadway by an inconspicuous door, a quiet hall, and a second door more pretentious than the first, one came to Pelton's. It was a reposeful place, carpeted and hung in delicate greens and relieved from sombreness by its sunlit windows and white curtains, pictures, and tables whose drapery was of aristocratic bleach. Broadway was shut without, or just sufficient of its hoarse voice penetrated here to deepen the charmed peace. Pelton's catered chiefly to women shoppers of the semi-exclusive class, but occasionally a man wandered in and was soothed and delighted by the deferential atmosphere in which he found himself enveloped.

Leone and Miss Belle Werner passed with a subdued swish of garments down

the room, to an alcove where sunlight, entering through patterned lace, fell upon a white trellis work enclosing palms and small shrubbery, and upon a large picture framed in a delicate scroll work enameled in white. Within, at a table, a lady and gentleman awaited the coming of the pair. Leone fell upon the lady in hospitable haste.

"My dear Clara — so sweet of you to come. I have brought Belle also. Are we really late? I 'm so sorry. My dear, how charming you look to-day; do present us, won't you?"

"Oh no, you 're not late at all; we 've only just come," said Clara. "Paul" — she turned and in sweet clear tones went through the ceremony of introduction, leaving Mr. Paul Elsner — a tall fair-haired German whose blue eyes were expressive less of piety than of swift determination — the most deeply honored acquaintance of Mrs. Irving Cleworth and her friend Miss Werner.

Then the four sat down to the business of lunch with that polite little bustle of pleasure and goodwill common to people who

are very well satisfied with themselves and each other. Leone, the inveterate foe of constraint in any function whereof she was the hostess, led the talk at once to the gentleman's supposed interest in charity, which she proceeded to discuss with her own sprightliness.

"So philanthropic and nice of you to take an interest in those places. I have never seen any of the really poor tenements myself, though they are considered one of the sights of the city, of course. Strangers commonly want to see them. So dirty and unsanitary and poverty stricken; really I should think they might be intensely interesting."

"Dear Leone, you were always so interested in the poor," Belle murmured audaciously. Leone laughed.

"Mrs. Cleworth means interesting as a sight, strictly," said Elsner, smiling.

"Oh, of course. As an actual experience in living — hardly. But I suppose they're a necessary evil. We Americans are a people of extremes, other nations say. To see

our Broadway you would not guess at Essex Street, for instance — would you?"

"Why," said the incorrigible Miss Werner, "you forget you are talking to a student of such matters, Leone. Give Mr. Elsner the cost of our Broadway sky scrapers and he 'll be able to tell you the exact number of tenements in New York. Won't you, Mr. Elsner?"

"Oh, spare us, Bella; your conundrums are a tinkling cymbal: they have the sound of wisdom but not the fact," Leone retorted. "Well, Mr. Elsner?"

"Ask Clara, perhaps she knows," said Elsner.

Clara shook her head and smiled diffidently. "Paul could answer you better, Bella. I 'm not strong on statistics. But I know Broadway means well. Those people who I thought cared the least about such matters are often the most willing to help."

"How interesting," Leone murmured again. "It must be such a pleasure to help — if only one is wealthy. Unfortunately, though, one can never be quite sure of the

people. There are so many impostors, Clara, nowadays."

Elsner's eyes lit up with amusement.

" Dear Mrs. Cleworth, Clara has found a pitiful case to-day, which she is dying to commend to some charitably inclined person like yourself. She can vouch for all the facts, and so can I. She is only eager to tell, if you care to listen."

They all turned toward Clara, and Leone begged with beguiling sweetness, " Do tell us, Clara, we are all so anxious to hear." Shrewd Belle Werner crumbled a roll and regarded Elsner with covert curiosity, and lost a part of the story by drifting into a speculation as to how it came about that this man was going to marry Clara, who, Belle's clear-eyed worldly wisdom said, was one of those girls formed far oftener for loving than for being loved.

But gentle Clara had awakened to enthusiasm. " Would you really care to hear, Leone? It is such a sad case. A family of six; the father has been in the hospital for three months; he is dying, poor man,

and will never come out again — and the mother has done washing until quite recently, when she slipped one rainy night on the wet pavement, and broke her arm. The rent has not been paid for three months, and now they have no food, and the landlord threatens to dispossess them to-morrow."

"Such a brute of a man," Leone whispered.

"Yes, Paul and I have made up forty dollars between us, but we need about twenty-five more to really settle things and relieve the poor mother's mind. You see they have pawned almost all their clothes, Leone, and the weather is growing cold."

"Certainly. It is shocking that a man can be so inhuman. Where did you say they lived, Clara?"

"On the East side, Second Avenue," said Clara, giving the number. "Quite near here, you see. Dear Leone, do you really mean it? — you are going to help them?"

"Indeed I am, and I 'm delighted you told me. I would n't have had the poor things turned out on any account. I happen to

be specially rich to-day" — Leone smiled sweetly — "and can spare the twenty-five easily. But to think of the depravity of that man, Bella."

Belle hesitated for a short second while she searched her friend's face. Leone's yellow eyes were flashing honest indignation, and her diminutive and placid loveliness seemed to have acquired an actual majesty of scorn and contempt. Clara was watching her in undisguised hope, but Elsner's swift blue eyes bespoke smothered admiring skepticism. Belle attacked the roll again languidly, and with a sympathetic murmur of assent. "It will be so interesting. I 'd love to go with you, Leone, if you 'll have me."

"You shall, of course. Let me see — I 'm to meet Irving at the Knickerbocker by and by, but there 'll be abundance of time. We 'll take a hansom to make certain, however. You said the place was quite near here, did n't you, Clara?"

The luncheon was already practically over. Soon the little party was retreating down the green sunlit room — Belle and

Clara in the lead, the chaperon and Elsner following. A look of perplexity struggled with politeness on the tall German's face. He was not quite sure that he understood the charming Mrs. Cleworth. He foresaw that he might find it necessary to reconstruct some of his ideas concerning her, but none the less he approved of her and of the felicitous chance that had vouchsafed him her acquaintance. Very few men did not.

At the curb a hansom stood. He handed Leone and her friend into it.

"Good-by," she said, "so glad to have met you, Mr. Elsner. Bring Clara to see me soon. One must n't desert one's friends even for the poor, must they?" she laughed melodiously. "Mondays I am always at home. Don't forget. And we 'll talk of your poor people again, perhaps, though I shan't always be so good as I am to-day."

Then the hansom slowly turned, and Leone settled back against the pretty tan cushions with a sigh. "Oh, me, what a relief. Pelton has too much green in his color scheme, Bella, don't you think? It 's the

worst setting in the world for me; I look bilious in it. — My dear, did n't Clara's German rather surprise you?"

"He 's not specially sanctimonious," said Belle.

"No, I should have said he might tell you more about stock quotations than piety. Clara won't hold him, you 'll see. Did you ever know such an insignificant mouse of a creature as that girl is?"

But Belle Werner's laugh was purely non-committal.

"At least she has raised twenty-five dollars out of you, Leone. You 'll admit that 's something of an undertaking in itself, — if you truly intend to give it, that is."

"*If?* I most certainly do intend, and you need n't look so incredulous. I believe in charity when I can afford it. Speaking of poverty, did you know poor Annabel Stewart's things are to be sold at auction to-day? At Chandler's. We 're going to stop there on our way. I'm determined to get that lovely Sat-suma bowl of hers — the one with the pedestal, you know. Irve gave me the

money this morning. Was n't it dear of him?"

"Very. The Sat-suma is dearer, however. You won't get it under two hundred dollars."

"Oh yes, it 's at auction, you know. But I 've been saving for a week, and I 'll pay two hundred, if necessary. That is — no, I 'm forgetting Clara's woman; I 'll pay a hundred and seventy-five."

"You won't get it."

Leone laughed. "Yes, I will. Annabel outbid me for it at Christie's last year, and I was so disappointed I cried for a week. I believe yet she did it out of spite. Those were the days, my dear, when I used to listen to Irve and try to economize; but oh, what *is* the use of having money if you don't get the things you want?"

"No use. That 's what I 've always said, and what I hope to practice. Here we are at Chandler's. Better keep the hansom, Leone."

Down the wide stairway from the second floor floated a subdued buzz of voices, mingling at intervals with the loud mechan-

ical monologue of the auctioneer. Upstairs a select company of bargain-hunters was assembled, and conspicuously near the dais stood the Sat-suma bowl, the light from the window behind striking richly across its quaint Eastern markings, and its delicately colored little dwarfs squatting amid backgrounds and sunsets of gold. It was a rare little treasure of oriental art-pottery, and Leone perceived it at once, and divined that the bidding would be keen.

"You won't get a chance at it, Leone," Belle whispered. "It's a beauty, though; I've half a mind to bid against you myself."

"If you do I'll never forgive you," Leone whispered fiercely.

"*Mercy*, don't intimidate me with those eyes of yours. You look as though you'd eat me right down."

"I will if you bid. Honestly, you'll forfeit my friendship."

"Goodness, I won't even open my mouth, my dear. You may depend on me." Belle good-naturedly subsided into the background. But it was not her habit to feel

abashed, and even Leone's inveterate self-complacency might have been faintly disturbed to note the quality of her friend's smile.

Ten dollars was the ironical first bid for the Sat-suma. Before the auctioneer's indulgent smile had faded, the price had leaped in three bounds to seventy-five. Leone remained warily silent. At the hundred and twenty dollar mark, all bidders but two retired from the field.

"A hundred and thirty-five."

"A hundred and forty." The bidders advanced more cautiously now.

"A hundred and forty-five," said Leone clearly.

A rustle of curiosity ensued as people turned to discover whence came the placidly determined voice. Leone met the eyes of several friends, who smiled in sympathy. Her desire for the Sat-suma was no secret.

"A hundred and fifty." One of the bidders gave it up, and leaned back in her seat discouraged.

"One hundred and sixty," said Leone

promptly, then in a whisper — " You 'll have to lend me some money, Bella, if it goes too far. I will *not* miss it again."

" Dear Leone, I 've only five dollars, really. — So sorry," whispered the imperturbable Belle.

Suddenly, from the rear of the room a strong, sharp masculine voice made Leone almost jump.

" A hundred and eighty."

Belle turned round with a stifled exclamation.

" Leone, why it 's the — it 's Mr. Elsner."

Leone did not turn or move. A faintly increased color heightened the charm of her face, and her figure seemed to grow alert; her eyes, grown wide open and bright, shone with determination.

" A hundred and eighty-five," she called.

And Elsner responded on the instant, " A hundred and ninety."

He had failed to perceive either of the ladies.

Languidly, as she performed all her most telling movements, Leone turned in her seat,

and looked in the direction whence the voice had come. In the same second Elsner's eyes fell upon her, and were steadily held by her angry beautiful ones.

"*Two hundred*," she called softly, and something in the quality of her voice caused it to be heard distinctly throughout the room.

A startled look of recognition swept over Elsner's face. He made a swift gesture of apology, and beat a retreat behind a group of prospective buyers that was attentively examining a sketch in water-colors by a rising artist. The auctioneer's hammer fell; the Sat-suma bowl was Leone's at two hundred dollars.

And that graceless Belle Werner laughed.

"Oh, my dear, excuse me. I 'm delighted you got it — even though you had to pay. I knew it was worth every cent of two hundred. But it 's lucky we did n't go to Second Avenue first, Leone, now is n't it?"

But such elation as Leone's was altogether proof against pin-pricks from Miss Werner.

"Don't preach," she said with severe dignity. "What has happened, Bella, is Mr. Elsner's fault entirely. I quite meant to help those poor, interesting people, but of course when it came to a choice between them and my Sat-suma — naturally I did n't hesitate. Some one else will do it. There are plenty of wealthier people than I."

"With no taste for rare china," Belle supplemented maliciously.

Leone ignored the impertinence till they had reached the door, when she turned indignantly upon Miss Werner.

"Belle, in my place you 'd have done exactly as I did! You need n't talk to me. And you 'd have gone home afterwards and begged the money from somebody else; your husband, if you had one."

Belle laughed. But in the mirth of her dark eyes and in her voice was a touch of something more enigmatical than words — scorn, perhaps, yet not for Leone only.

"Undoubtedly," she assented flippantly. "I would not have hesitated a moment to do as you did. In fact, I can't think of a woman

CHAPTER IV

MR. THOMPSON WERNER, BROKER

A BENEVOLENT but sadly henpecked gentleman was Mr. Thompson Werner, upon whose pocketbook Belle made her threatened raid that same evening. Pleasant and ruddy of face, with scintillating gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and a bald spot on the top of his head, he belonged to that class of poppas who, as his daughter was wont to say, encouraged one's natural rapacity by his endearing willingness to be eaten. She did not explain how she came to be short of money again, partly because she felt that her present proceeding rather detracted from the lustre of that charitable act, and partly because it was not necessary to explain. She could gain her point without it.

The poor gentleman's favorite indignant figure of speech on all such occasions as the

present was that he was "no Crœsus;" but to-night the case was so uncommonly aggravated that he varied it.

"Why, bless me, Bella, you 're absolutely conscienceless!" he cried. "You 're beyond anything, my dear. Did n't I tell you last time I was no Crœsus?"

"The last dozen times. And poppa, if you talk so much about Crœsus you 'll inculcate the idea into my mind," observed his daughter gravely. "I should never have thought of him myself. Anyway" — she laughed — "I don't believe anybody uses that expression much except pretty well-to-do fathers."

The elderly gentleman snorted. No Crœsus, he was very well described in Belle's own phrase "well-to-do;" being a broker recently retired from active business, but not yet fully weaned from it, as his habit of going down punctually every day to the opening of the stock market showed. For the rest, he was stout, held decided opinions about the ruinous extravagance of women at the present day, and had one hopelessly incur-

able failing in life — his extravagant daughter Belle.

"My goodness, Bella," he expostulated, "it is n't more than a week since you came to me before. What do you do with your income? What do you women do with the money anyway? You can't eat it, you don't smoke it, and you have n't any families to keep. Is it possible that an income like yours is n't enough to buy fal-lals for one woman's little body?"

"Oh, dear! but you have to have so many of them — the fal-lals" — she said, "and they keep going out all the time and new ones keep coming in, and of course you have to keep up. If you don't you 're old-fashioned in a week. You know you hate an old-fashioned woman, poppa."

This was so true that it seemed better to dodge it.

"Well, but what do you have the fashions for if you don't want 'em? Why don't you do something about it? I 'd do something about it if I was a woman. I 'd get Congress to take 'em up; legislate against 'em. I 'd —

But the long and the short of it is, you like 'em. You 're like sheep, you women. Every one of you wants to do what she sees the other one doing."

Belle arose with a low frou-frou of silk and a faint tintinnabulation of chattels and appurtenances, and circulated solemnly before him.

"If you 'd only take 'em up anyway, poppa, as a man. You might be able to help us, you know. I think myself legislation is what 's wanted. Now, as a conscientious Congressman, what would you legislate against first?"

He ran a critical eye, absurdly mitigated by pride in her well-moulded, beautifully-groomed figure, up and down every one of the reprehensible but pretty fal-lals. He was about to take exception to the long silver-incrusted Japanese coral necklace, but remembered in the nick of time that it was his own gift. The same objection held in a second case; and, besides, the black and crimson toilette was in such irreproachable taste, and its ornaments of red coral and

silver so exceedingly becoming, that he felt his fatherly judgment going askew.

"I don't believe you 'd look right if you took any of 'em off; you 've got to wear 'em if the rest do, I suppose," he summed up weakly. "What you 've got to do, Bella, is to economize; put your income away, save it, or you 'll go to the poorhouse, mark me, some day after I 'm gone."

"Goodness! I 'm anxious to save!" she cried dutifully; "but I 'll tell you what the trouble is, poppa: my income is n't quite big enough. If it was a little larger I 'm sure I could save some nicely. You just try me. Make it a few hundred dollars larger, poppa, please, just to encourage me. Really, I 'm in earnest."

"I dare say you are, but I 'm no Crœsus," he retorted dryly.

"Poppa, here I am with just two dollars; your only daughter, and you won't help me. I would n't have believed you were so hard-hearted."

"You 're taking a graceless advantage of me, Bella," he cried. "I never said I would n't

help you; but I wish you 'd learn to appreciate the value of money. Women don't nowadays."

"Well, I 'm anxious to learn. How is one to appreciate two dollars, I wonder? Now be good, poppa. Make me a present of some of those old stocks you have no use for. You said the other day you wished you could get rid of your Union Central. Give it me; you 'll never make any money out of it, but it will bring me in a few dollars a year extra, and I promise I 'll save every cent."

Mr. Thompson Werner arose and straightened his stout back with an effort, and putting his hands behind him, looked at his daughter.

"My dear Bella, that 's about the coolest proposition I ever listened to in my life. Why, I put thousands of dollars into that Union Central, thinking it was going to rise, and here I 've been losing money on it ever since; and now you coolly request me to hand the whole business over to you. Upon my honor" —

"Well, then, anything else will do me as well," interposed Miss Werner hastily.

"*Really?*" he queried. "And suppose I did it? Don't I know you 'd sell it before the winter 's over for dresses to wear at the Horse Show?"

"I would n't. You try me."

"You 're perfectly preposterous, my dear. I would n't think of it. You need n't tell me you 'd be willing to bank your dividends every six months? — *bank* 'em, mind?"

"Yes, I would. Now, poppa."

"Now, Bella, I tell you the thing is sheer folly. I will *not* be guilty of it." He sat down again with a heroic severity that was truly pathetic, and his only daughter, looking down upon him, actually laughed.

"Poppa, you sweet old gentleman, I 've a conscience, fortunately, but if some girls had you for a parent they 'd impose upon you, I 'm certain. You know you 're as guilty as can be this minute — yes, don't you deny it. Oh!" she cried in acquisitive ecstasy, "it 's lovely of you, dear — *lovely!* I knew you 'd think of some way of helping

me out." And she rumpled his fringe of white hair round and round affectionately, having an undue advantage over him by being the taller, while he was striving to smooth it down again, and muttering to himself that he could n't remember having originated the present expedient for helping her out.

"No, but the result is the same," she said. "You only wanted showing. And the twenty-five I wanted to carry me along in the mean time, you know — you won't forget it, will you, poppa dear? "

CHAPTER V

DISHONOR

MR. ELSNER availed himself frequently of the invitation to call on Mrs. Cleworth. The first time he went with Clara, but when the visit was ended there had developed in the most natural way a reason that required his calling again very soon. This time he was unaccompanied. And on each occasion thereafter there existed—so naturally that it could scarcely have happened but by design—a reason for the next. Leone apparently was unconscious of any contrivance. At least her name and standing precluded such a suspicion, for she was known for a martinet in her observance of social laws. So Mr. Elsner himself was perhaps the only person who could have explained.

The gentleman's history, so far as it concerns our story, is brief.

As Belle had hinted, he had only recently come into wealth; and it was in the days of his poverty that he had made the acquaintance of the Mannings, mother and daughter. He was new to the country then, and, for reasons of his own, as reserved as he was poor; so the acquaintance had made no great headway at first. Yet, reserve and poverty notwithstanding, he possessed a certain force which prevented his lapsing into insignificance. It was not a wholly pleasant force — anything very positive in its nature seldom is altogether pleasant — but the air of distinction resulting was certainly agreeable to both ladies, especially the younger; and his history, so far as they knew it, was tinged, like himself, with an attractive suggestion of mystery and romance. They learned by and by that he had left Germany owing indirectly to some one's love affair, which had plunged his own family and two others into violent dispute. Several duels had been fought, and at last some high and mighty personage had been killed, and Mr. Elsner had immediately afterwards left the Fatherland and

sailed for America. Anything more explicit than this the two ladies never learned. For a year Clara shivered over the obvious inference and refused to believe it; yet very possibly the doubt even gave him a certain advantage in her mind, in the same way as we view with partiality some large handsome animal, capable of savagery towards others perhaps, but in our presence subdued — or even, in a splendid domineering way, eager to gain our affection.

At all events, at the end of three years, and without any definite avowal of it, the outcome was that they were in love with each other; Clara the more deeply, perhaps, because of the attraction of a strong nature for a weaker, and because her isolated life made her the more susceptible. Elsner, however, was as poor as she was herself, and their future might never have materialized had it not been that an opportune event, such as actually happens at times, removed the obstacle at the critical moment. The event was the death in Germany of an elderly aunt, who had been the implacable

leader in the late quarrel, and who had now left to the exile, as a mark of her approval of his share in it, the whole of her large fortune.

His engagement to Miss Manning was announced soon afterward, and the marriage set for the following January. Clara was very happy, because her faith in him was unbounded. Yet the touch of money had transformed him, or, it may be, had caused him to revert to his former self. In prosperity he was not quite the same, though he was fully as much beloved; and love, which hopeth all things, reasoned that it was the hand of happiness that had wrought the change, and strove dutifully to stifle some disquieting little hankerings of its own, and be glad for his sake.

Clara had not perceived that love, in her lover, was a good deal like the hunter's instinct. The greatest joy of it had lain in pursuit. Uncertainty, which had held his ardor unabated, was now over; the prize was secure, what need for further effort? Perhaps he was no great anomaly in this respect, for

men before him have been known to exhibit that tendency in love, and the more of animalism in the man the greater the tendency. Presumably he still loved her after a fashion, and intended to do the prescribed duty of a man in the circumstances; but it is certain that his interest had flagged.

It was at this stage of his feelings that he had made the acquaintance of Clara's friend Leone.

Weeks had now passed since Clara's story had so harassed the feelings of that lady as to lead her almost across the threshold of a generous deed. It was a cold night early in December, and Clara was in her room dressing nervously to go out.

Without, the wind was high, and thin snow lay inclemently about the street corners and in the interstices of the pavements. On high the stars glowed frostily, and in the spaces between the street lamps " that great inverted bowl we call the sky " seemed to have drawn nearer, and to be holding silent communion with the world. But in an apartment bedroom whose window opens on a

shaft one may not observe these things, and Clara — whose room it was — was shut off from any more admirable sight than that of her own pale face in the glass.

She was thinking of anything but that, however; for the face was a troubled one, and yet somewhere in its expression was a fleeting look of strength which had not been there before. Such strength soft creatures sometimes show when brought to bay, or some women of the helpless kind when dragged unexpectedly face to face with a dreaded crisis. Any creature, whether beast or human, that is being mercilessly driven to the wall will develop that look, and it had been growing in Clara's face during these weeks. She had abandoned her tenements and charitable work. They had become monstrous and impossible; for the girl was no longer at leisure to give others the pity that was being withheld from herself.

Her mother entered the room softly.

"Paul won't be here for half an hour yet, Clara. You need n't hurry. Let me help you, my dear. You know I 'm so pleased

you are taking an interest again in people of your own class. You 've gone out so little of late that I 'm afraid every one must have thought it odd."

Clara's face relaxed. " Dress me up, mother. Make me look as worldly as you possibly can, to prove it is n't so." She smiled. " Which class would you say I belonged to? You 're referring to Mrs. Cleworth, I suppose, are n't you? Would you consider that she and I belong to the same class?

" My dear Clara, of course. She has a great deal more money than we have, but I assure you it was n't always so. And, thank goodness, money is n't everything yet, even in New York."

" So those who have n't got it say, mother. Nobody else. And I don't think Leone and I belong to the same class."

" Oh, my dear, don't talk so. You never used to say such strange, harsh things. She 's no better than you, Clara — not a bit."

A sudden look of suffering turned the girl's eyes dark, but Mrs. Manning did not

observe. In another moment the electric doorbell rang and she hurried away to answer it, for their single servant had gone home for the night.

Clara remained for an instant before the mirror, arrested by that fugitive, fear-haunted, yet beautiful thing that looked back at her from her own dilated pupils: something that too plainly appealed for protection and pity. Suddenly in an overwhelming impulse of grief she clasped her hands together and turned away.

"Oh, she is not better; no, she is worse — worse. I am no thief. God knows I would not do what she is doing. I would have mercy."

Her lips scarcely moved; her eyes were dry and bright in their misery; yet in the attitude, in the low passionate unhappiness of the voice, was all that tears and frenzy stand for. She turned and began to pace the room swiftly, as though its walls confined her in some cage from which she must make frantic effort to escape.

"Mercy?" she whispered hurriedly. "I

must not expect mercy of a sponge. That 's what she is — a sponge, and she lives and absorbs and smiles happily because she is so well filled. Oh, Paul — you are so ruthless yourself — can't you see? She 'll take all you bring her, your admiration, your love which belongs to me, — which she knows belongs only to me, — and she can give you nothing in return. Oh, she is far too respectable for that. But she will smile, cruelly," here the agonized whisper ceased suddenly; for a space the blue eyes gazing again into the mirror grew dark with pitiful multiplied terror at some vision they saw there, — "oh, my God, how she would smile if she knew — what my awful folly has given. How they would all smile," — the white throat moved convulsively as though upon a sob, the whisper rose into a wild prayer. "Paul — Paul, they won't know it? You 'll protect me from them, won't you?"

She stopped abruptly with a frightened gesture. Her mother's footsteps in the hall had recalled her, and she seized upon some fine pins and made a feint of fastening a

curly wisp of her light hair. In a moment Mrs. Manning entered, her delicate old face very bright.

"Ah, my dear, look! I haven't opened it, but of course I guessed. Roses again. Such a lover as that Paul is! And I was thinking only this evening that he had n't been to see you for a week."

Clara's white face flushed with eagerness sorrowful to see. She turned and took the box from her mother's hands. "Roses," she murmured with trembling lips; "oh, how lovely!" But her heart was crying, "My dear, my dear, forgive me."

Nervously her fingers fumbled at the knot in the string, which it would have seemed a desecration to cut. It gave way at last, and then the roses lay uncovered, so red and perfumed, and, it even seemed, loving. Conspicuous among the crimson petals was a card with a single word written across it, "Paul."

"I must go and fill those two tall jars with water," said Mrs. Manning. "They seem to hold roses best. Fortunately you 're dressed, Clara, and can admire them all you

wish. Red roses — every one of them red. My dear," said the old-fashioned lady, smiling archly, " you may be quite certain that he loves you."

Clara laughed light-heartedly, without even troubling to turn round. " Why, of course," she replied. In the last five minutes it had grown so blessedly easy to believe it.

But even when the two tall jars were quite ready the elder lady made no effort to return to her daughter's room, for she had heard the key turn softly in the lock and knew that she was excluded.

Meantime, Clara, in her robe of dark trailing silk and lace, caught up richly by dull gold ornaments which reflected the light, had fallen to her knees beside the bed as she had been wont to do in days only a little removed from these. Her fair hair mingled with the cool crimson petals, which kissed her lovingly in no resentment that her embrace crushed them. She was not weeping. Her heart was sore with happiness at the flowers' perfumed touch ; and she was

praying — not to God, but to Paul, that he would forgive her base mistrust, and would still and forever endow her with that dearest gift on earth or in heaven — his priceless affection.

Presently the demigod himself appeared in the wake of his roses. A little happiness had touched the negative in Clara and brought out all her latent possibilities of beauty. As, smiling and radiant with recovered confidence, she passed down the hall to meet him, she made so piquant a vision that Elsner, for a moment, almost forgot how love had seemed a little wearisome of late.

Stepping backward he surveyed her, enchanted.

"Clara! Why," he whispered ardently, "you are beautiful, dear. Did you know it?"

"Am I? *Roses*," she answered, smiling. "Send them every day, Paul, and I will grow every day more beautiful."

He laughed gallantly. "Impossible! You could not in my eyes. I shall call you Lady Clara to-night. Are we ready for Mrs. Cleworth's now?"

"In a moment. But, Paul, it would be just as pleasant, would it not, if we remained at home here this evening?" she suggested timidly.

"Possibly it would. But why?"

"Nothing. I am not in the mood, that is all. I think," she said, striving to call up an excuse; "that Leone is antidotal to me. It is like putting a daisy into the same room with a tuberose. She obliterates me."

"Nonsense. If you only knew it, it is you who are the antidote to her, my dear," he said, conscience-stricken, as he had private and particular reason to be this night. "You make capital foils for each other. Come, I want you to come with me. The night is perfect, and you will enjoy it."

"I have no desire to act as a foil for Mrs. Cleworth, Paul," Clara declared with a pout.

But he was in the mood to be charmed, and laughed caressingly. "Oh, fie, my lady is jealous. You won't be a foil for her or any one to-night. Have I not said you were beautiful? Ah, now you will come."

"Yes," she said, smilingly compliant. It

was not that she was convinced by the flattery, but only that she feared to cross him too stubbornly; and, moreover, it really seemed that after all her fears might be merely shadows.

CHAPTER VI

ALL ABOUT MONEY

THERE were no shadows, however, in Mrs. Cleworth's house that night, except those especially designed for artistic effect, unless it were a faint one in the eyes of the master. The house, which was in the West Eighties — to the grief of Leone, who pined for the éclat and more sumptuous fashion of the Seventies — wore an air of bright yet reserved festivity, for Leone received her friends to-night. And nowhere was there an inappropriate shadow but in the master's eyes.

He had been stopped, as he was about to go upstairs, by his three servants, headed by Donald, the man-servant whom Leone had insisted on engaging a year before. Donald was an Englishman, and was precise and conscientious in speech and manners, and

the other two had appointed him their spokesman.

"We beg your pardon, sir; we don't wish to give any trouble, sir, especially to-night, but we 'ave decided as we don't think we can wait any longer, sir," said the man.

Cleworth was not in a good temper. Business affairs had gone persistently wrong of late, notwithstanding the pressing necessity that they should go right; and he replied brusquely: —

"Indeed? You 've quite decided, have you? Then suppose you tell me what you 're talking about, man."

"About our money, sir," said the man steadily. "We don't want to give trouble, but we think we 'ave waited long enough for it."

The master gravely descended the three steps that separated him from his employees. "Your money?" he repeated in bewilderment. "I don't understand you. What is it you 're talking about, Donald?"

Norah, one of the maids, here interposed, and enlightened him quickly.

"I said you was n't aware of it, sir, or you would n't have it. It 's just this. We ain't seen a cent of our money for the last three months, Mr. Cleworth, sir; and Donald ain't seen his for nearly four months."

Donald's face remained perfectly impassive, but the eyes of the two women, at least, bulged greedily at the signs of Cleworth's evident consternation at this news.

"Donald, do you mean to tell me you have not received your wages for four months?"

"Yes sir, it 's nearly four months, sir. It 'll be four in the middle of December," said Donald without emotion.

"I 'm very sorry indeed. There must have been some mistake, Donald; evidently Mrs. Cleworth has forgotten you," said Leone's husband in a quiet voice. "And you two girls," he added. "How much is due you?"

They named the sum. But Norah's tongue still itched.

"I said we 'd oughter come to you before, sir. I said most like you knew nothing of it. I said, 'Most like he gave her the money

long since, an' she 's been an' spent it on herself.' "

" Be quiet, Norah," said Cleworth sternly; and the maid stepped back at once, feeling no further desire to talk.

Cleworth swept the three before him to the hall table, and tearing three blank cheques from the book in his breast pocket, made them out on the spot. The last one he handed to Norah.

" You 'll see I 've given you an extra month's wages instead of notice. You are to leave this house in the morning," he commanded sharply. " You — Donald and Frances — go back to your duties. Mrs. Cleworth cannot be annoyed to-night while guests are in the house. To-morrow she will, of course, explain to me."

Quickly the three faded from his sight; and then Cleworth went slowly upstairs to his own room.

Alone in her dressing-room on the same floor Leone was surveying herself with a glance of critical satisfaction. Just pride in the mirrored apparition shot from her lazily

beautiful eyes — so like those of some well-filled, contented little animal, confident that in its own sense of well-being lies all that is needful in a universe. Bending nearer to the glass she opened them wide and, studying them with intent, definite care, caught a fleeting glimpse of what lay within — then smiled slowly upon that image of herself.

"There 's something quite peculiar about them, I 'll admit. Like a cat's, as Belle says. What matter as long as they 're beautiful? Oh me — if there was only money enough in this world, what I could do! I could be great — *great* — if I had money. It 's hateful to be always needing money," she whispered plaintively to the image. "If it were n't for the risk of being discovered I could rob a bank — oh, yes — and be just gloriously, extravagantly rich for once."

She threw her arms out with a sigh, then paused to arrange to better effect a diamond ornament among her chiffons. In a deep embrasure to the right of the dressing-table were stacked in artistic looseness regal chrysanthemums, extraordinarily large —

white and yellow mingled in a Japanese jar. Deftly, and yet with some hesitation, she grouped a few of them together, drew a little aside to admire more fully, and then stood thoughtfully fingering them, half in doubt.

"If only I were quite sure where they came from," she whispered. "It would be a delightful temptation to pique poor Clara's saintly insignificance, if my suspicion is correct. But it would never do, of course. One must observe the proprieties. To think of the impertinence of the man; and I do love the things so. They actually smell of money."

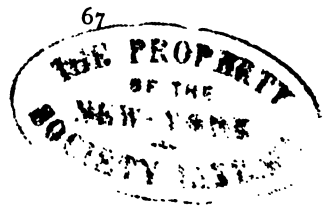
Shaking her head decisively, she moved away.

"No; they're lovely, and I'd like to do it — but I must n't. He probably sent them; he 's audacious enough for anything."

An impatient movement issued from the next room; and raising her clear voice she called sweetly, "Irve?"

"Yes?"

"Come in here, Irve."



"I can't come at present."

"You must. I 'm going down now. Come in here and tell me how I look."

She waited placidly till he appeared at the door of the dressing-room. Not that she needed any more expert opinion than her own, but she read by the signs that "Irve" was inclined to be difficult to-night — the habit had been growing upon him of late — and this was intended as a mild corrective. He looked a decidedly difficult subject as he stood there in partial deshabille — a large, fine-looking figure of a man. Indignation, however, and a fair determination not to have any unpleasant settling of accounts between them to-night when their guests were expected, placed him at conscious disadvantage.

Leone's smile was as conscious in its mastery.

"Well, will I do?" she inquired softly.

"Fine. You 're never anything else, so where 's the use of asking me?" he answered perfunctorily without looking at her.

"Oh! — and you would n't know my

gown again if you saw it on the street. You never looked. Irve, don't be a bear." She laughed, and stepping up to him fearlessly, propped with considerable effort his square, blue-mottled chin upon her finger-tips. His eyes came reluctantly to her face. "Irve," she wheedled, "if you were a bachelor now would you fall in love with me again to-night?"

He strove manfully to preserve a dignified displeasure. Did he not know her, lovely as she was, to be almost without conscience? Still, they had been married only two years, and she looked so irresistibly seductive that in spite of himself he smiled.

"Oh, you 're *ripping;* the stunningest girl on Broadway. I 've always said it. And this?" — he took a trimming of beautifully embroidered chiffon in his hand — "how much must I pay this time, Leone?"

"Not a cent!" she laughed joyously; "I knew you 'd say it! Irve, you 're getting to be such a mercenary wretch that one hates to ask you for money, and I decided I would n't. I paid for this myself, my dear."

His anger slipped out grimly.

"With the servants' wages, I presume."

She stepped backward, her smile going, and a look of dark displeasure in its place.

"It was a mere temporary arrangement," she replied steadily. "If you had come to me instead of questioning the servants I could have told you. I will pay them next month. Living in our house, they can have no immediate expenses, and there is no reason why they should not wait if I wish it."

"Except mere honesty," he replied, with all the contempt he felt for such dealings in his voice. "It was their money, not yours, and they have waited three months already. How is that, pray?"

"It will not hurt them," she answered, turning away coldly. "There is no question of honesty or dishonesty. It has not been convenient to me to pay — that is all. I will pay next month."

"If convenient," he pursued witheringly. "You need not, however. I was so overwhelmed with shame for you that I paid

them on the spot when I heard of it. Is it by such means you propose to buy the things I cannot afford to give you, Leone?"

Without deigning a reply to this she turned her back upon him, walking away to the mirror and looking again on the complacent image in it. The sensuous, self-centred little animal looking forth of its eyes only comprehended that it was being brutally and unjustly jarred, and resented it.

"You 're grossly exaggerating matters, Irving. I told you I intended to pay. It is merely the old money question with you again; you think of nothing else of late. You 're growing shockingly mercenary."

A mingling of incredulity, anger, helpless appeal shone in his eyes as he looked at her. "Leone, I am not mercenary. I have never acted in a mercenary manner toward you," he protested.

"Yes, you are mercenary, Irving," she repeated evenly. "You reduce everything to dollars in your own mind. You suspected me of dishonest intentions just now for the sake of a few dollars. You judge every act

by its money value, and you see no other side to it. You are like Belle Werner in that. It is mercenary to think so exclusively about money."

"How am I to help it?" he burst forth at her. "I strain and sweat and deny myself every day in the week, and every night I lie awake planning how to keep pace with your requirements, and I can't do it. Have you no heart? Why did you insist on making this such an expensive affair to-night when I begged of you not to do it? Why don't you give me a chance to get on my feet? I 'm a young man yet, and I could make a good fight for us both if you 'd give me half a show. You think I *talk* of money? I tell you I *dream* of it. You are running me into the ground, Leone. You 're driving me mad."

Not even her worst enemy ever accused Leone of ill temper. She waited rather disdainfully till he had finished, regarding him as though he was a child who could not be made to comprehend, and meantime rearranged her chrysanthemums.

"There is no use in being unpleasant, Irving. Persons in our position expect to do certain things, and they cost money, of course. I cannot help that. I am not extravagant, but I expect to do those things always — and the money will have to be forthcoming. You have always had it before."

The transparent fallacy of reasoning with her silenced him. She had no vicious intent. She looked at him impartially across the chrysanthemums, seeming, to his injured fancy, the living, breathing embodiment of their overgrown costliness. Woman and flowers were each lovely in their way, the most perfect that modern wealth and extravagance could produce, and she was merely voicing the requirement of both. And perhaps one was quite as much the result of nurture as the other, for, as she said, the money had always been found for her heretofore.

Looking at the feathery, heavy heads, he asked, "Where did you get them?" It was not that nothing remained to be said on

the other subject, but that, all having been said so often before, it was useless to repeat it.

"I don't know," she said good-temperedly. "Are n't they lovely? They came a few hours ago, no message, no card, no anything, and I 'm dying of curiosity. I think I 'll have the whole jar of them stand *so*, beside me,while I receive. That would be effective — would n't it?"

"Very," said he, "but as you happen to be my wife, Leone, you 'd better throw them out of the window. You are not reduced to receiving flowers from anonymous admirers, I hope. I will not have them near you."

Leone laughed. "Nonsense. Irve, you're simply jealous. I won't hold them, or touch them, but I want them *there* — just so — for a background. They give me an air. Can't you see it?"

"Exactly; I see and I object. I will not have it, Leone."

She did not reply. He watched her for a moment also in silence and with a hardening face. But she would not speak, and full

of injured and contemptuous wrath at her he turned on his heel and left her.

Leone took a last deliberate survey of herself and then passed downstairs, pausing pleasantly at the landing to tell the maid that the chrysanthemums were to be brought to the reception rooms immediately and placed a little to her left while receiving.

The huge white and yellow blooms so near her face invested it with a delicately pliant air that was very attractive and misleading, and her golden brown silk and lighter chiffons embroidered with little yellow flowers made a combination that expressed irresistibly the yellow-brown eyes, so hospitably soft and beautiful now, and innocent of the most innocuous hint of shrewdness. Was her voice, in reality, specially sweet as she welcomed Clara and her fiancé?

"So glad to see you both. Clara, we're delighted that you're really beginning to take an interest in us ordinary mortals once more. We're to thank Mr. Elsner, I sup-

pose; of course he would not have come without you."

It was a very polite, affable murmur, but to Clara, conscious of the paling of her own attractiveness in the presence of this bright star, the words seemed a taunt. And she saw Elsner regarding the enemy with such deep deference, and held her head higher.

"I believe I've been to see you many a time on my own account, Leone, since I first knew you. But I can't say I ever regarded you as an ordinary mortal, at any time."

"No? Was I so much worse, Clara, always?"

"Different," corrected Clara dubiously. "One did not expect the same of you as of others, Leone. Now one expects it less than ever."

She passed on, rather striking in her dark silk and dull gold ornaments, but with her fair cheeks flushing, and with a smarting ineffectual sense of chagrin. It was deeply disconcerting that Paul had lingered for a moment with the enemy. He was only say-

ing over again what she herself had said, but there is all the difference in the world sometimes in the ways of saying a thing.

That, however, was only for an instant. An elderly gentleman, propelled by a smiling, designing, dark-eyed young lady in his rear, seemed so anxious for Mr. Elsner's place that the pause was the slightest, and the latter was compelled to pass on after Clara. It was Mr. Thompson Werner, stout and innocent of design, but very much under the dominion of his daughter Belle. It would have required very much more than "dear Leone" in all her glory to dazzle Miss Werner's astute perceptions, or to render her even remotely uncomfortable. There was, indeed, only one person in all the world who possessed the power to do it, and that was unconscious, much-troubled Cleworth.

And as for him — he was unavoidably suffering some of the disadvantages from which gentlemanly husbands must occasionally suffer. If he had lived in another section of New York he would very likely have vented his just displeasure by seizing the chrysan-

themums, and promptly pitching them out of the window, and afterward taking his charming wife by the hair and enforcing his commands on her. Being as he was, however, he was accepting the position as best he could. And there were music — tunes, Mr. Thompson Werner called them — for which Cleworth's bank account was oozing eighty dollars an hour, subdued laughter, and high sweet voices of women, and the deep buzz of men's, and moving colors and lights and flowers, for Leone always did such things well. She was the excellent hostess, all pervading, watchful, charming, discreet, and she did not once touch the chrysanthemums. Half won from his displeasure, as he had been a hundred times before, Cleworth turned his back on reflection and stood to his duty like a man, grimly conceding that, if one's substance were inevitably to be wasted, there remained at least a certain Spartan pleasure in seeing it so gracefully done.

If Belle discerned his endeavor and helped him he was unconscious of it. In his bachelor days he had always entertained a whole-

some liking for her, which the subsequent preoccupation of his courtship and marriage had caused to be forgotten. It revived with something more than its ancient force tonight, as he found himself one of an entertained group in a corner, where she sat ensconced between a triangle of palms and a red shaded lamp to which he had always felt a masculine aversion. The lamp cast the upper fronds of the palms and the speaker's dark expressive eyes in shadow, but brought out with added zest her warm smiling lips and a certain large womanliness in her gestures. But her talk was flagrantly of money, and recalling Leone's sweeping denunciation of them both for the habit, he smiled and listened, and enjoyed wickedly.

Most of the guests were intimately acquainted with Wall Street and the stock brokerage business, and this was "shop" talk.

"Men lose money in the Street because they get nervous about it," Belle declared. "The secret is not to care. Once you put your money down it 's as good as gone any-

way. Now when poppa once in a while has a good thing I sometimes invest in it, and just because I don't care very much about it either way I quite frequently make some money."

"Yes, but the times when you don't? You're bound to care then, Bella," some one objected.

"No, not necessarily. Then poppa cares," said Miss Werner.

The men laughed; and the victim, Mr. Thompson Werner, scintillated upon the speaker in a state of indignation.

"Heads, I win; tails, you lose," he explained with animus to the circle.

"You can stand it," Cleworth laughed. "It will keep your advice disinterested. There was that Union Central some weeks ago, Bella. Some of us, you know, thought we knew what was doing on the inside, and I should n't wonder if he led you to believe it."

"Well, perhaps," said Belle, her eyes meeting her father's in a flash of irrepressible mischief. "I got a good deal of it, but — no,

I won't tell about it, though. Poor poppa, he feels sensitive about it still. Not that it hurt me at all, however."

Much sympathy of a bogus kind was expressed for Mr. Thompson Werner, but that forbearing old gentleman indignantly scouted it all. Indeed, it was not fair of Belle to distort the facts so.

Elsner, whose acquaintance with most of the party was comparatively recent, had stood quietly amused on the outer edge of the group. Now he came, as he thought, to the old man's relief.

"Did any of you see the late bulletins of the evening papers?"

"No. Which papers?"

"Most of them, I imagine. I saw two. There's a funny story out about Union Central. They say that the Evening Limited, which passes Dry Falls at seven o'clock, was suddenly halted at a place just this side of Blue Valley. A flood, or something like it, had been discovered just ahead, it seems — although it was n't raining, and there 's no river about there."

Elsner paused.

"Well, what was it?" said Mr. Thompson Werner.

"Well, remember this is not my story — the papers said it was *oil;* that in about five minutes the 'Limited' would have run into a gusher that had opened right in the roadbed, about a mile further on."

A chorus of groans arose from the men.

"Oh—say! Now, now; lucky she stopped, old fellow, was n't it?"

"Must have been fish-oil," said Cleworth.

Elsner, smiling, made a gesture of repudiation. "You give me too much credit. I told you it was not my story. It was on the bulletin boards."

"How many?"

"Two that I saw, — the 'Evening Star,' and the 'Motor,' and I fancy there are others. There is no reason why such a thing could not happen."

"No, of course not, except that it never does. But, Great Scott, suppose it did just once."

"*Well? what?*" cried a clear arresting

voice. The lady of the house, keenness flashing now from her widely opened brown orbs and from every turn of her petite well-poised presence, stood beside the master, demanding, " If it did happen, Irving — what of it ? "

" Dollars, Leone. Riches — for the fellow who bought my Union Central to-day. The stock will open at fifty in the morning, and I sold to-day at thirty-two."

" Me too. I let a block of four hundred go at two and three-eighths," mourned Elsner.

" I did n't, however," cried Mr. Thompson Werner gleefully. " I held on, did n't I, Bella ? You fellows had your laugh at me a little while ago, and I did n't begrudge it you ; but after all, you know, the chap that laughs last is the one."

Now either the excitement of the news had upset his memory for the moment, or — more likely — his continued watch and worry over the stock had inclined him in secret to regard it as his own property still. But Bella seemed to be laughing at him.

"Why, poppa," she cried mirthfully, "but you're only the next to the last to laugh. I come after you. Have you really forgotten that all the Union Central in this family now belongs to me?"

He turned to stare at her in such evident consternation that the company forgot its own troubles to smile at his. "By Jo, I did almost forget it, Bella, for a minute. But it's all the same, is n't it? I gave it you, you know. You would n't take advantage of me?"

"It would be too wicked of me, poppa, or I'd love to," admitted Belle with regret. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll sell it all back to you at the opening price to-morrow morning. That way you'll still have a chance to make some money by it, and I'll make some too, and it'll be fair to both of us — won't it?"

There was a shout of laughter from the men and a chorus of "Oh's" from the women. Mr. Thompson Werner protested.

"That's an outrage, Bella. I'm your father! I've lost any amount of money on that stock already. And besides" —

" Oh, I don't believe the whole business is anything more than a canard, anyway," declared Leone, detaching herself and turning impressively upon the contumacious Belle. " And to think that you, Bella, ever had the audacity to hint at me for being mercenary. Why, I would n't victimize any one like that for — for " —

"A Sat-suma," supplied Belle in self-defense, and Leone involuntarily drew her breath ; but Elsner, who alone might have understood the allusion, here called sharply, " Please wait a minute, every one. Listen to that."

" Extra, by Jo ! Cleworth, maybe that oil was n't so fishy," cried old Thompson Werner excitably. " Say, Bella darling, you *will* reconsider ? "

But Bella darling wore the pleasantly inscrutable air of a Chinese goddess while the sheet was brought in and read amid breathless silence. It had waited, it announced, until the extraordinary rumor of the early evening could be verified, but now there was no longer any doubt that the Union Cen-

tral Railroad had suddenly acquired a valuable oil property. The paper hilariously wished to congratulate the holders of the stock.

At that shock the enthusiasm of the men burst out of bounds.

"Has anybody else got any of it? I'll give forty for it now on the chance," cried Cleworth.

"Forty-five!" seconded Thompson Werner.

"Irve, stop! I will not have it. This is not the Stock Exchange." Leone's sense of the proprieties triumphed for a moment — only for a moment, however; then she turned irresolutely upon Belle. "How can you be so mercenary, Bella?" she asked with grieved dignity.

In the general excitement and the gradual shifting of places, Clara had drawn near to Belle. The rise or fall of stocks meant nothing to her in these days. Was she not too safely poor now to care? But her friends were affected, and, most of all, Paul was evidently deeply interested. Unobtrusively she

watched his face, her own pale pretty one smiling in eager sympathy.

It was just then that Leone's wide golden brown orbs, flashing with disappointed acquisitiveness, rested in a kind of forlorn appeal upon the ones that they first met. These happened to be Elsner's. At once a reassuring flash of those swift blue ones answered her — and the gentleman stepped up to the host.

"How much did you say you 'd give, Cleworth ? "

"Forty."

"I have a thousand shares still. I 'll let you have five hundred at that figure — *since Mrs. Cleworth desires it.*"

The emphasis was only faint. But following it there came a curious momentary pause — a question that shot from Cleworth's eyes in a glance — yet so brief that only one or two caught it before he answered laconically: "All right, sir. Most kind of you, I 'm sure. I 'll give you as much for the rest if you 'll sell."

"No, I 'll hold on, thanks."

Then Elsner turned away, eluding the anxious Mr. Thompson Werner, and looked straight at Leone for the thanks which were his due. Any hasty idea that he was a man to play the fool was at once corrected by his virile personality, and a certain swift directness of action not unlike Leone's own; his polish was the attribute of his hardness, as in the case of granite and other impenetrable substances.

But if he was granite Leone was diamond, and worldlier and harder. She met the obliging German with an alluring smile and a slow seductive inclination of her impertinently beautiful little figure; yet even in the act moved perceptibly nearer to Cleworth. Mr. Elsner was welcome to serve, to admire, even to bestow his perjured love on her if he chose, but let him observe the proprieties, and require no acknowledgment of it from her. She was the irreproachable Mrs. Cleworth, a thought grasping and conscienceless in a few matters perhaps, but the leader of her set and a redoubtable moralist whose single and impeccable virtue was

by no means to be so lightly brought to a test.

And yet for all that, poor Clara's face had grown a shade or two paler. What to her was Mrs. Cleworth's immutable respectability? For her all tragedy lay in her lover's face, in his thinly veiled ardor in the service of this fair, ruthless rival. But no one noticed her except that inconsistent and incomprehensible Belle Werner, who slipped her arm quietly into the girl's arm and drew her down on the divan with a friendly whisper. "Sit down for a little, Clara; there's room here. I never stand if I can help it; it's the most tiresome work in the world to me."

The little court around the red lamp broke up. The ladies drifted away to the dressing-rooms and the men went into committee on the news of the evening. At last there remained only Elsner and old Thompson Werner who sat in the smoking-room with Cleworth, awaiting the descent of the ladies. Glancing along the vista of deserted rooms, Elsner saw the distant chrysanthe-

mums, glimmering royally still under lowered lights. He was a man who had never seen the necessity for weighing his words.

"Cleworth, those are most luxuriant blooms you have there. I have n't seen any as fine in New York. Did you get them here?"

The host smoked on for a moment without replying or even turning his head.

"Can't say. I should say New York, however, if I made a guess. They arrived this afternoon without the ceremony of a card."

Poppa Werner laughed. "So? And you have n't the least idea who sent 'em, Irve?"

"Imagine I have — perhaps," said Cleworth slowly. Through the smoke his eyes rested upon Elsner, only casually, perhaps, and the pause grew a little long.

"Aha! who was it, Irve?" said the old gentleman inquisitively; and Cleworth withdrew his gaze at last and speculatively watched one of his smoke rings in its flight to the ceiling. "Some audacious scoundrel masquerading as a gentleman," he said

shortly, and then threw his cigar away and they all rose, for just at that moment the ladies came down the stairs — Clara, and Miss Werner in her furs and careless state, and Leone in her gown of browns and yellows with smiling eyes to match.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE PICTURE GALLERY

A GREAT many people were passing up and down the exhibition gallery. Girl and boy art students, admitted on complimentary tickets from artist friends, wandered past alone or in groups, marked out by their careless clothing and eager artistic young faces, merciless in criticism but quick as lightning to seize the elusory idea in colors and sympathize with it. Older than these, with faces sometimes jovial, sometimes a little bitter, and sometimes sad, came those intellectual Goliaths, the critics, whose word was to make or unmake the artists and the artists' fames and fortunes. And last and more plentiful than either, society in flocks — bringing its catalogues — came to linger and buzz respectfully before the great names that it knew, and to lay up ammuni-

tion of art lore against the winter's chattering campaign, just lately inaugurated. There might be other great names there, perhaps, in embryo, but they had not yet been announced to society, which, not having leisure to inquire into and explore such matters for itself, buzzed along happily and unconsciously, and believed whatever and only what it was told.

Amid the low-voiced throng of worshipers, learners, and fashion seekers Leone was alone, Belle Werner having defected at the last moment. It was the morning after the reception, and Leone had her catalogue and sat enthroned in a meditative divan before some of the finest pieces in the collection — on her face an expression of studious thought, which was probably pictures, but might have been anything in the universe.

Said a voice beside her, genteelly subdued, but distinct, " Now I wonder whether they ever anticipated being taken so seriously, Mrs. Cleworth ? "

Emerging suddenly from her brown study, she found Elsner standing there. She could

see in his eyes the displeased memory of his unappreciated chivalry of the night before, but besides that there was in them that speculative glance with which his admiration of her was always mingled, and which almost equally affronted and pleased her.

"It's proper to suppose they anticipated it, is n't it?" she said, coldly smiling. "And one comes here to improve one's mind besides, I suppose."

"Oh, certainly. Shall you object if I take this seat next to you? I feel tired this morning."

He took the permission for granted, and dropped into it without waiting her reply. The seat was a public one, of course. But in all his bearing toward Leone there had been from the first a faint suggestion that polite forms were a perfunctory concession, to be gone through for appearance' sake, and then dismissed for the fiction that they really were. And this intent of his, of which she was very well aware, used to fascinate her even while it roused her animosity against him. It was as though he always

said — " You lovely, disdainful little hypocrite, I know you. Therefore I understand you perfectly."

Since now he had regarded her permission as superfluous she made no pretense of giving it, but sat in displeased handsome silence while he looked about him, apparently unconscious that he had offended her. " What shams people are," he said at last in a low confidential voice.

" In what way, and who are shams ? " she distantly inquired.

" About one in three of all these. Look at them; they don't care any more about pictures than — pardon me — than you do."

Leone turned scarlet in genuine anger. In her own circle she aimed to be thought somewhat of a connoisseur — or at the very least commendably proficient. One impulse was to collect her small belongings and go, but another and last was to remain and suppress this presumptuous Philistine whose manner argued such an especial understanding of her.

" I do care a great deal about them. And

it is quite possible that you misjudge those people as greatly as you do me. It seems a pity that such remarkable omniscience as yours, Mr. Elsner, should be so misdirected."

He laughed confidently.

"Mrs. Cleworth — you were not thinking of pictures."

"I assure you I was," she replied with chill dignity.

"Oh — pardon me. I really thought" — He paused, and picking her catalogue from the cushion handed it to her derisively. "Since you say so, I am of course wrong, but my omniscience thought it saw you for the last ten minutes deep in this calculation."

Angrily she took the paper from him and thrust it beneath her muff, for the back of it was in fact covered with figures and items of which she alone knew the meaning. "Oh!" she said with acrid emphasis, "if you were overlooking me, of course, — if you *spied*" —

She had thought to overwhelm him, or at least to force him to a denial. But he only answered composedly: —

"Honesty is n't always best, but it 's very attractive in some persons. Now one could see that you were honestly bored, but look at those ladies over yonder before that woodland scene. You 'd naturally think they were discussing it? But no — you hear them — they are telling each other how much onion they like in potato salad."

Leone bit her lip at the very audible truth. "At least," she said tartly, "I don't mix my pictures with potato salads."

"No, thank goodness. Mrs. Cleworth, are you still angry with me?" he asked with a quick change of voice.

"Yes, I am angry!" she flashed defiantly. "I am very angry! It is my objection to you, Mr. Elsner, that you are always making me angry with you."

She was aware that the statement was only half a truth. That which incensed her so was that in spite of his evident admiration he did not believe in her — would not take her seriously. Many men had burned incense before her, but they all — even steadfast, loyal Cleworth — had taken a much

lowlier place than this one. The incense itself, however, was not really disagreeable for that, and still less for the fact that it belonged of right to some one else. And this he knew.

"It is a great misfortune to me whenever I displease you, Mrs. Cleworth," he said more humbly, for he did not wish to vex her too greatly. "Are you really *very* angry with me? I will make amends. I would like to help you, for instance, with that calculation, if you 'll allow me."

But with the words an idea had suddenly flashed into her head. She saw an opportunity to utilize him; and in her eagerness to put him to use scarcely cared about her tacit admission that she was not really very angry.

"No, thanks; it won't be necessary. But you may help me otherwise if you will. I shall have to have some one. There 's something I want to know about."

At once his voice grew less sardonic.

"Mrs. Cleworth knows she may command me in anything," he began in lowered tones.

Cold opinion was one thing, but his feeling for her was such a totally different thing as to cause him to grasp with eagerness at any chance of coming nearer. "Anything that I can do" —

"Oh, it 's a simple matter," she interrupted, cutting him short. "I have decided that I will not stay here in the city this winter. I am tired of remaining all the season as I do. I want to go South when my friends go."

He looked rather mystified, but nodded gravely.

"I shall go to the Pines, I think; and I wish to rent a suitable place for the season, but I — but I have no one to make inquiries for me." She hesitated a little before his questioning look, then explained with slight emphasis, — "no *confidential* person, I mean. You might do it if you will; it will not be at all difficult. I want a very nice place, of course, — a first-class cottage; I shall not consider the expense if everything is first-class. I suppose if you tried you could get me information of such a place, could n't you?"

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"You know I will try," he answered,— then he paused, and looking at her with a kind of venturesome triumph, went on distinctly, — "and if I am able to find what you wish I am to report, I presume, to Mr. Irving Cleworth?"

"No," she said sharply, and her color rose again with vexation and her eyes almost fell for an instant. "No, I have not mentioned the matter to Mr. Cleworth as yet. Otherwise I should not need you. If you should hear of anything, report it to me, please." Then she picked up her catalogue again, and openly ignoring his further presence there, fell to studying it. He was dismissed.

"Must I go now?" he asked when a suitable interval of this treatment had elapsed.

"Oh" — she turned with raised, inquiring eyebrows and took momentary cognizance of him again. "Why, yes, I suppose so. There is n't any reason why you should remain, I believe, is there?" she rejoined impertinently.

He met the insolence full, smiled slightly at the assumption of innocence in it, and

bowing ceremoniously, left her without a word.

She remained where she was for some minutes after he had gone, chained to the seat by rage. He had dared to understand her so well after all — had dared to drag from her the confession that she had secrets from which she excluded Cleworth, but to which she was willing to admit him. And, most unpardonable of all, he had dared by that smile to drag away conventions and show her how fully he understood. Had she not wished merely to use him? What right had he to discern anything beyond that? Yet she felt that he had not only seen right through her, but had required her to pay for the privilege of using him.

CHAPTER VIII

SHADOWS

WHEN the music, and the lights, and the jokes and laughter of friends were over, one gaunt fact remained for Cleworth to face in the cool morning light. His affairs had been growing terribly entangled of late, and since it was plain that no retrenchment was to be expected of Leone, it remained only for him to discover some way of increasing his income and so extricating himself as best he could from his difficulties. He must make more money; it was absolutely imperative that he should make it somehow, and make it with speed.

The endeavor to keep pace with her ever-increasing demands upon him was a mental strain that harassed him, as he said, day and night, and he had begun to feel of late as a swimmer might who had a millstone tied

about his neck. It was clear that unless he could quickly devise some means of raising his head high above the water he would soon be utterly swamped. He determined, since the sudden change in the fortunes of the Union Central Railroad promised a brisk movement of that stock, to plunge heavily in it and make all possible by the opportunity. It was with consternation, therefore, that he read the news in the morning papers.

Disaster, it seemed, had fallen close upon good fortune for the stockholders, to whom the great oil strike now bid fair to be anything but a blessing. Perhaps it was owing to the lawlessness of the crowds attracted from Dry Falls, or to the carelessness of some employee of the road, no one seemed to know exactly; but during the night a spark, a little flame, had somehow reached the oil, and instantly converted that dark glistening wealth into a caldron of fire. A tremendous explosion had resulted, obliterating hundreds of feet of roadbed and killing a number of persons, and completely

wrecking a freight train that stood on a siding. The railroad's property had been devastated, and traffic in either direction was indefinitely suspended.

It was extremely unlikely that the price of Union Central stock would rise for some time to come. It was far more likely to fall.

Face to face with his own emergency, Cleworth's mind worked quickly. His nature was not the rash one that is swept off its feet by every fresh sensation, otherwise he could not have worked himself up at the age of thirty to the reputable financial position he occupied in the world. But make money he must. A sharp downward movement would afford him his opportunity as well as an upward. He decided to sell out his holdings, reverse his position in the market, and "sell short."

The gods themselves cannot strive against necessity, we are told. So the drowning man would not choose straws to catch at, we must suppose, if anything better came within his reach. Though Cleworth's policy might be a short-sighted one, it was the best that the

moment offered; and immediate events at least justified it. Bad reports from the scene of the fire continued to come in all the morning, and, satisfied that his judgment had been correct, Cleworth plunged heavily, becoming the leader of the bears in the fierce battle that waged all day about the post. He was not wiser, or rasher, or more foolish than other men in that vortex, but he possessed to the full the commercial instinct for money getting, though the personal advantage accruing to him from it was little more than nil. Leone, was he not compelled to think of her? He would have her as richly dressed and housed, as exclusive, as aristocratic and fashionable, as any other man's wife. If he had not wished it he would not have been a true American. And her accusation, "Yes, you are mercenary, Irve," and the knowledge that to-morrow would surely bring new demands and exactions which he could not meet, urged him on.

It was the next day, a little before closing time, that the reaction came. Word arrived that the fires would be brought under con-

trol in a few days, and also that the road's losses would be many times compensated by the richness of the find. This effectually checked the downward movement, and since the stock had been greatly oversold, the price began to mount again with a buoyancy that no efforts of the bear traders could check. They were quickly forced to cover at disastrous losses; and Cleworth, who had been one of the heaviest dealers, found himself on the verge of bankruptcy. At the close of the market he was still "short" of a large block of stock, having been unable to cover.

He was almost beside himself with anxiety and dread of the morrow. He knew that the opening prices in the morning would be extravagantly high, and that unless he could procure the required stock before then he was hopelessly lost.

Late in the afternoon — so late that the last of the curbstone brokers had long since departed from New Street, and the army of clerks and employees from the down-town office buildings was in full rush Harlem-ward — a man dashed hurriedly across the

bleak gas-lit station at Rector Street, and by a flying leap boarded the last car of the express just as the gates were closing. In the overflow from the car docilely packed around the conductor stood Mr. Thompson Werner, stout and satisfied, and delayed some time beyond his usual hour, who inadvertently received the impact of the stranger's arrival full in the chest. There was no room to stagger, but his lungs shot forth an involuntary cough, and he recovered his breath with a friendly, almost inarticulate gasp.

"Hello, Irve, you catapult! when you want to come that way why don't you choose a man your own age?"

"Oh — Werner? beg pardon. It is n't my fault, however, that you 're so bloated with your gains that no ordinary citizen can stand beside you." It was Cleworth, speaking with ostentatious lightness but pale and anxious-looking; in whose face the upward-thrown glare from the thousand lights of the city seemed to have brought out new bitter lines of haggardness. The shadow that for weeks past had lurked in his dark shrewd eyes had

communicated itself to his whole aspect, and made to look like a pitiable effort at effrontery the laugh with which he turned to the old man.

"Say, Werner, you 're still holding on like grim death to that Union Central of yours, I suppose?"

Mr. Thompson Werner chuckled, and, as well as he could in the crush, shrugged his dissent.

"Not me. I don't hold a scrap of it. But Bella is holding on, don't forget." He had been very pessimistic himself that morning and had strongly advised Belle to sell, and now he was rather inclined to laud her obstinacy as perspicacity after all.

"Is she?" said Cleworth thoughtfully. "She 's right. I wish I 'd had a little of her sense. You don't think she 'll sell, do you?"

"Hardly. You know, my boy, if Bella has a fault it 's a close connection of the money question. You saw how she handled me the other night? reg'lar close-fisted, was n't it? She knows the value of a corner lot as well as any of us."

Cleworth laughed rather miserably and Mr. Thompson Werner rattled on garrulously. "I never knew a woman yet, Irve, who could n't squeeze a dollar harder than a man if she wanted to. Somebody calls 'em 'the impecunious sex.' Must be because they never seem to get enough, I guess."

Cleworth nodded his head, but scarcely heard. He was not in a mood to find diversion in a discussion of the sex. He remained grimly silent, braced shoulder to shoulder with the friendly well-to-do broker on one hand and a negro stevedore from the North River wharves, dyed three times black with coal dust, on the other. The train drew into the Fourteenth Street station, where a crowd of women shoppers more or less cross and weary was awaiting it; and the conductor drew back the gates and the men flattened themselves together, and the women streamed aboard and into the gas-lit, heated interior, reeking with engine fumes and the steam and warmth of packed humanity. Then on again the train roared. But out on the platform, where the wind whistled past the ears

of the men, a very stout woman had come to anchor in front of Cleworth. She was flustered and breathless from the crush, and finding in him a firm, convenient bulwark, leaned her tired adiposity against him and sighed, and the tail feathers in her hat drooped on his breast contentedly. His anxious, disjointed soul rose in revolt, and he unceremoniously worked himself free of the stout woman.

"Oh, hang — I can't stand this crush, Werner! It gets worse all the time. I 'm going to work through to the observation end; there 's usually room to breathe back there."

He reached the door and throwing it back by main force strode roughly in through the crowd. The company he had left breathed a little more freely for the extra space and watched curiously as the movement of heads and shoulders down the car aisle disclosed his passage. Mr. Thompson Werner too watched uneasily. He was a kind old man, and recalling the whispers he had heard on the Street he did not quite like

the look of trouble in Cleworth's face. Still Mr. Werner hesitated. He was stout himself, and to follow would not be easy.

He did not hesitate long, however. He had known Cleworth since his boyhood, and now that he was in trouble the old man's heart warmed to him. Not many minutes passed before they stood together on the little platform at the tail of the train, with the enormous city rushing past them — ever receding, yet continually present. A plumber's apprentice with his brazier of dead charcoal occupied one end of the platform, and they two took up the opposite corner. Cleworth stood for a while with fixed, moody eyes staring at the dark, lengthening sky-line on either side, where a soft brick-red tinge of sunset still warmed the far-off paling blue. From out of the south arose now the luminous glare of the 'Tenderloin,' flouting with its gay cordial effrontery that dim celestial peace. The clang of the electric cars, and the rattle of traffic over the cobbled streets, the occasional wailing of a boat's siren on the river, and underneath all, the eternal mur-

murous undercurrent of thousandsof passing feet, gave to the metropolis her voice, her largeness and personality.

Cleworth turned with almost a cry to the old man.

"My God, Werner, there 's money enough in her, — floods of it. I must be an idiot or a natural fool not to get my hands on it."

Seeing the surprised questioning in his friend's face, he checked his vehemence abruptly in a mirthless laugh. They were speeding up the middle track sacred to expresses, and the plumber's boy, who had been hanging over the rail, drew back with a jump and smiled round sheepishly as the down-town train whizzed past his face; but the two men were not looking at him, and he returned to his contemplation of the street.

"What is it, Irve?" questioned the old man softly. "Have those Union Central fellows put you in a corner?"

"Some. Thirty thousand." Cleworth answered with laconic harshness.

"Jiminy; that 's too bad." The old man

jammed both hands in the pockets of his rotunda-like overcoat and began to whistle reflectively. "You went in pretty deep, Irve. Bella has n't as much as that, anyway."

Cleworth maintained a savage silence.

"Dear, dear — and there 's Leone," said Mr. Thompson Werner regretfully.

"Leone. Exactly — there is Leone," Cleworth burst forth in a voice more bitter and concentrated and savage than his silence. There was the very passion of apprehension and misery in it — and yet the sentence seemed to have been broken off short. Like some good soldier who finds that his tongue has almost betrayed him into uttering treason, he shut his mouth hard and remained silent.

Good Mr. Werner looked mildly embarrassed for a moment, but after expanding his chest and opening and rebuttoning all the buttons on his overcoat he felt himself master of the situation once more.

"Oh tut, tut, women are all like that, Irve. They all like to spend the money —

her. Leone could be very sympathetic and sweet at times; and in a sudden loneliness of trouble that overwhelmed him, he had decided almost as he entered the house to tell her. In spite of their standing differences about money matters she loved him, he doubted not; and she would try now to understand. It was a little love of which he was going in search; for he felt in great, pitiful need of it.

It was in this mood that his brain received its second picture which it transmitted to memory. Leone was in her reception room, and by the low murmur of voices coming from thence he perceived that friends were with her. Disappointed, he would have turned away to wait, but the sound of one voice for which he had lately conceived a strong dislike caused him to change his mind and enter.

Elsner was there, in the act of making his adieux. Leone, with that luxurious grace which invested even her worst exactions with a sense of fitness, had risen and was extending her hand affably. Beside her the tall

straight German seemed somehow not so very tall, perhaps because of the extremity of his deference, as, bowing low over the firm small hand — so low that the sombre eyes of the man in the doorway followed downward with jealous premonition — he raised it with a final quick movement and held it for a second against his lips. Any onlooker might have supposed it to be merely the gallant act of his nationality had not the fervor with which it was done given it a deeper meaning. But the smiling yellow eyes of the lady, while not displeased, were cold.

"Good-by, Mr. Elsner. Give my love to Clara, won't you? So sorry she could not come too," Cleworth heard her saying, and Elsner winced and changed color as he looked down upon her.

She was superb, amused, bewitching, *cold.* She was punishing him now for his assumption the day before. Pleased by his homage, to be sure, she was still that immovable pillar of society whom no clandestine pleasure that must approach by devious ways could tempt from her high place. Love

alone indeed, of any shade of morality, would never fuse this diamond, and, strangely, Cleworth felt it even more chillingly than did Elsner.

But the next moment was a trying one for the latter. Advancing to the door he came most unexpectedly face to face with Cleworth, whose entrance had been quite unintentionally noiseless. Elsner would have stopped, but the master of the house drew aside, answering the visitor's surprised salute with a formal, silent inclination, and throwing the door wide with unmistakable meaning. Men in a lower walk of life would have brawled on the instant. The deadly earnest of these two flung its challenge in a fearful punctiliousness. Elsner flushed, paused for a second, and glanced back; Leone seemed to be smiling scornfully on them both, and with a slightly accelerated movement he bowed farewell to her and passed out, and in a moment was in the street.

Cleworth was in no mood now for gentleness. He eyed his wife in stern silence for a space.

"Did you remember to thank him for his chrysanthemums?" he asked ruthlessly. The accumulated trouble of the day, which had found its climax in this, was unbearable.

"Oh, how dare you!" gasped the angry little beauty; "you know this meant nothing, what you saw just now," she flashed out at him scathingly; "you concluded to eavesdrop in your own house — that is bad enough, but it is much worse not to have done it well. A little practice will soon help you to do much better."

"Stop!" he commanded, "I was looking for you. I wanted to speak to you, and when I heard your voice in here I came. Leone, that scoundrel has the unmitigated impudence to be in love with you, and you permit it."

"How can I prevent it?" she laughed angrily. "You would not have me accuse him of it, I suppose. He has never felt at liberty to speak of it, however, and he never would, if that is what you feared. And I could have ignored it. You have insulted *me*

by treating him like that. It is impossible for me to ignore it any more now."

She stood, trembling but erect, in the middle of the room and regarded him with eyes that flamed like a pair of topazes illumined by inner light. He had actually taken her agreeable pastime which she had been so careful to preserve in impeccable propriety, and with rude, audacious hands had converted it into a disreputable thing, which, if she touched it again, would soil her. But her inimitable assumption of offense at him only blew his scorn to white heat.

"The fellow's conduct, madam, is too insinuating. I do not like it. Like all women you overestimate your own power, but I tell you an animal of that breed takes the bit in his teeth sooner or later, and I don't choose to wait for him. His fiancée, Miss Manning, is a friend of yours, is she not? Consider, are you treating her correctly?"

"Clara?" she cried contemptuously. For a moment her lips quivered with the burden of knowledge unspeakable, but she shut them sharply and dismissed that matter

with an eloquent little shrug. "He came to see me this afternoon on special business, a matter of no concern whatever to Miss Manning."

Cleworth waited, but she vouchsafed him no further enlightenment.

"*Or to me?*" he asked sternly; and her determination quailed a little.

"I had not intended to tell you just yet," she answered slowly and unwillingly, "though of course I have no objection. He came to bring me news of a cottage in the Pines, which I have been some time trying to secure. It is quite exclusive and high-priced, but it will suit me better than any other. I wish to go down there this season."

At least she had created a diversion.

He stared at her in silence with a demoralizing sense of the uselessness of fighting any longer this feeble yet resistless personality. *This* the sedative of which, in his nightmare of difficulties, he had come in search? She would never comprehend. The only way to control her was to crush her, kill her, which, of course, was not to be

thought of. Suddenly he burst into laughter so short and fierce and derisive that Leone shrank back.

"Oh," she moaned, in vague fear.

In that instant he saw her through new eyes. The veil which Love interposes before our eyes to show us things as they are not, dropped, and he beheld a lovely, gluttonous, cowering little parasite, grown prosperous and gaudy through good feeding, and trembling now in fear lest its maintenance was vaguely threatened. Yet it was such a helpless, self-confessed, inferior thing, that he checked his anger in scorn of it.

He crossed over and stood in front of her, for once, at least, her complete master.

"Listen to me. Do you know what is going to happen to-morrow?"

"No." She threw back her head, endeavoring to outface the dark lightning of his glance, but failed for some cause not clear to herself.

"I have lost a great deal of money lately," he explained abruptly; "you knew that before. To-day has been disastrous to me.

To-morrow I must fail to meet my obligations. I shall be a bankrupt, and they will expel me from the floor. Do you understand?" He paused, while she looked at him without a word. "You may dismiss this courier of yours if he needs further dismissal. I have no money for cottages in the Pines or anywhere else," he concluded in a rasped voice.

It is humiliating to make confession of defeat, even to ears that sympathize. Even while he spoke Cleworth felt the leash in which he held her slipping. She walked off from him to the door, gathering poise as she went. She was the old Leone once more, but filled now to the lips with venom, as she drew aside the silken hanging with one hand and glanced back upon him.

"Your money has always been such a trouble to you, Irving — and to think that now you have lost it. It would almost have been better to give it to me, would it not? You will recover it, however. People do. Meantime I shall go on with my plans, as they are quite indispensable to persons in

our position. Mr. Elsner could have made them cheaper, but I dare say when the time comes payment will not seem much worse to you than it usually does."

The curtains came together with a scarcely audible swish and shut her out from him. He made a furious step forward, but by a tremendous effort controlled himself and sat down. His pulses throbbed hard and fast. Had he once passed the door and seen her again he would have won his issue by the argument of the ape, the gorilla, and men nearer to the primeval than he was. But he sat fast in his chair, and the impulse presently passed. Then he went out and buried himself and his worries in his club, and saw her no more that night.

To Mr. Thompson Werner likewise, in a less degree, the evening had seemed unpleasant. He had done his best with Bella, and the result had been exactly what he had anticipated. Mr. Werner had always liked Cleworth, and he felt a humane reluctance to watch him now struggling for his finan-

cial life without a single hand stretched out to aid him. Mr. Werner would gladly have extended his own hand had there been anything in it of value in this crisis; but he was powerless, and since Belle had shown herself harder hearted than he would have believed credible, he had philosophically given the matter up, and now lay dozing in his easy-chair with his handkerchief across his face.

And Belle had gone away to her own room, and stood by the unlighted window looking out upon the river, for the house was a fashionable modern apartment house overlooking Riverside Drive. Out there was a world of quiet shadows and darkness, peopled only by gliding lights faring back and forth in silence like voyaging ghosts. Only the sparkle beneath betrayed the river, which stretched wide and black and unrevealed, lapping the keels of the little boats riding at anchor, and washing sullenly among the dark wet piles under the boat-houses and piers. Quiet footfalls of a pair of lovers, straying unseen down the farther side of the Drive, rose faintly to Belle's window, and listening,

she wove a dream about them. Her worldliness had dropped away like a cloak, leaving only a sweet, sad woman whose lips smiled mournfully in the darkness and whose eyes were dim. She was living over again her father's reproaches, holding herself very still to hear him say that her heart was flint to allow Cleworth to be ruined when she had all the power to help him. Oh, how obtuse, how mercifully undiscerning for a father he was. *Flint?* Suddenly she stretched out her delicate, clever hands in a wordless gesture of suffering, and for a little moment the child that lies hidden away in the heart of the weariest of us sobbed voicelessly in the dark. "Oh, my dear — my dear — if she only loved you I could almost forgive her for wearing your life away. She is so unworthy — she has not a thought beyond herself. And when your substance and your hope and courage are gone she will throw you away like a squeezed lemon. Oh, I am base, Irving. You do not love me; I would not ask it now. But I cannot be flint to you, my dear; you will see."

But good. unsuspecting Mr. Thompson Werner sat asleep in' his chair in the next room, with his handkerchief across his face.

It was three minutes before opening time on the Exchange floor next morning when a broker acquaintance approached Cleworth. The latter was very pale, but collected. He had seen other men ruined within the last twenty-four hours, and, knowing his own end was now a matter of only a few moments, he was prepared. He was not prepared, however, for what occurred.

"Hello there, Cleworth! I've been chasing you the last half hour. Where have you been? Do you want to buy Union Central?"

Cleworth's tongue went dry; his throat muscles seemed to constrict and keep back his voice. "How much?" he whispered hoarsely.

"A thousand shares."

"Ha!"—the sound was like a laugh, but altogether unconscious and automatic. "Done, Hackett. I'll give you the opening price."

"No, you can't have it at the opening price. You 'll have to buy now. Those are my orders."

"D——! what do you mean? how much do you want, then?"

The other broker tossed back the profanity with a laugh; he had been in trouble himself on a time and could understand the irritability. "I mean, you lucky dog, that some one is bent on making you a present of a few thousand dollars. My instructions are to sell the entire block of stock, to you exclusively, at yesterday's closing price. Do you want it or not?"

"To me exclusively?"

"That's what I said."

Cleworth's pencil was working almost automatically even while he spoke. In five seconds the stock had changed hands. A good proportion of the amount he lacked was his — he had a working chance once again. He had been white before; he was sick and trembling now from the utter relief.

"Just a minute, Hackett; who has — who

can have been so extremely kind?" he queried almost timidly.

"A lady uptown, customer of mine. You must know her, I suppose: Miss Belle Werner. Her father is old Thompson Werner, you know; used to be with Walton, Werner and Fiske."

The seconds of the last minute were being ticked away, and the brokers were crowding like ants about the centres of impending conflict. Cleworth, vainly endeavoring to recall a hundred loose floating strands of memory, had just sense enough to interpret the faint curiosity in Hackett's face. He rose with a man's instinctive loyalty to the occasion; but a curious sense of having long gone blindfolded gave to his explanation a halting, uncertain sound in his own ears. "Oh, yes—Miss Werner. That explains it perfectly; she 's an intimate friend of my wife's. Lucky for me, as you say."

Then the president's gavel came down. On the instant the voice of the floor arose; loud, composite, storm-driven, and full of that hurried note that tells of men in the mass

being pushed on the defensive, straining to save at least a remnant. The market was rallying by leaps and bounds from its recent depression, and Cleworth was sucked into the vortex and lost. But Belle's help had brought him a respite at least. He succeeded in covering his other contracts although at serious loss; but had it not been for that three minutes' interview with Hackett he would have been doomed.

Why had Belle done it? All day he listened curiously to the explanation he had given Hackett, "she was a friend of his wife's." In his uprightness he never discovered that he was only half satisfied with it, nor that he was reflecting rather tenderly about his old bachelor days, when he and Belle had been such uncommonly good friends. For the tenderness was so honest and unembarrassed that it did not occur to him to analyze it.

CHAPTER X

A DUTY TO SOCIETY

In that dimly-lit, æsthetic, drapery-hung recess, which every one in the house except Cleworth himself referred to as his "den," Leone spent the morning following her quarrel with him. Her night's rest had been disturbed; the memory of the quarrel troubled and daunted her. Cleworth's derision of her little well-laid plans had seemed alarmingly real. The final ring in his condemnation of her was so convincing even in memory that it shut the door upon every hopeful avenue of expedient that her self-love could evolve. She could conceive of a number of ways in which to attain her end, with the aid of a little money. But money, unfortunately, was the first and final necessity in every case. And he had said, with that fierce, hateful laugh that still appalled her, that he was a bankrupt. She knew

the winter in Egypt, you know, and their place is quite the nicest and most exclusive to be had down there; it requires special engineering to get it. But it rather looked last night as if we should have to give up the idea after all."

Belle looked very deeply interested and said, "Indeed?"

"Yes. Clara's German — Mr. Elsner, you know — has been looking it up for us. The agent in charge is some kind of an acquaintance of his, it seems, and the matter is practically arranged, and everything will go along smoothly now, I hope. You 've lifted a load off my mind, my dear Bella."

"Mr. Elsner seems to be quite a versatile person, Leone, does n't he? Let me see — philanthropy, stock jobbing, and real estate, not to speak of a romantic propensity for paying rather noticeable civilities to married women!"

Leone laughed and passed over some sweets from the Buddha's right elbow to the critic. "Here — don't be so acid, Bella. He 's versatile, but very useful."

"Is he? You probably know, but if I could find a single legitimate pretext for it I should cut him. I despise him as it is. I wonder what that simple Clara can be thinking of."

Something mysterious and not at all pretty strove for a moment with Leone's pleasantly gratified air. Her voice dropped to an odd neutral tone. "My dear Bella — how?" she inquired lazily.

But Belle did not answer. With grave, charming politeness she had passed up the dish to the Buddha, who regarded her stonily after the manner of gods and cut her dead; so she replaced the dish, murmuring regretfully, "Sorry," and Leone was moved to scorn.

"Bella, don't be so idiotic. Answer me!"

"When are they to be married?" said Belle imperturbably.

"I don't know. I heard January, as every one else did; but I don't inquire."

Belle laughed. "Oh, of course not. One can understand that it would seem cruel of you, Leone. Still one dislikes to ask Clara,

and one naturally comes to you for the news."

It was a daring speech despite its tone of banter. Leone scrutinized the face of her guest before she answered sharply: —

"My dear Belle, not naturally at all. I decline to be made responsible for Clara's affairs. I know nothing of them, and I give you my word that I take even less interest in them than you do. You ought to know that."

"I do. It is exactly why I speak. I met Clara yesterday at that affair of the Merritts'. She looked rather unhappy. Leone, she only wants that wretched German — and have n't you enough?" Belle was grave. Her voice had sunk strangely low, and a note so like entreaty had crept into it that Leone looked at her in wonder.

"Good heavens, Bella, what ails you? Enough what? Do I look like a Mormon?" She broke off, smiling as she groped upward for a fan with carved ivory sticks that lay on a shelf over her head. The wide silk sleeve of her kimono, falling back with the

motion, revealed her arm's supple whiteness and the tenaciously soft firm clutch of her fingers as she opened and shut the fan with a snap that brought the sticks clicking together.

"Dear old Bella; you could n't conceive of any other reason for Clara's unhappiness, I suppose, could you?" she laughed caressingly, yet half mockingly. Some peculiarity of expression about her mouth gave it a look of cruelty.

A discreet knock at the door interrupted this extraordinary by-play, and saved the vexed inquiry that was rising to Belle's lips. Leone's one man-servant, Donald, entered, bearing a lady's card. Leone glanced at it carelessly, then immediately with an undecipherable look passed it to Belle, saying aloud —

"Speaking of the angels, my dear! Clara Manning!"

"That's a funny coincidence, is n't it? lucky one, too," said Belle; then moving to take swift generous advantage of it, "Well, I shall leave you now. I have to go down-

town this morning, and of course you will want to talk to Clara, Leone — won't you?"

But Leone laughed and declined to accept the farewell by leaning backward upon the cushions of the divan with lazy, smiling insolence. She tapped imperiously with her fan upon the Buddha's great toe as he stood adjacent.

"Oh, no, please don't run away, Bella dear; there's no necessity, really." She turned to the servant: "Donald, did you tell that lady that I was at home?"

Donald had done so, since, though it was early in the day, he knew Miss Manning for one who held the informal entrée of the house. His mistress regarded him with more distinct approval than she was in the habit of showing to servants.

"Very well," she said commendingly. "Go down again, Donald, and tell her that I do not receive to-day. When she comes again, if she does, you will give her the same message. Remember, I am never at home to that lady. Wait — come here a moment!" Leone stretched forth her hand and taking

the helpless little card lying beside the Buddha tore it once across and threw the pieces on the salver. " That will make repetition unnecessary," she laughed carelessly.

Donald left the room with a shamed face. He was only a servant, but he found it no easier to bear an unprovoked insult to a woman than would any other man; so as he descended the stairs he fitted a smothered epithet to his lady, and modified the unpleasantness to himself by suppressing the torn card.

But in the "den" silence reigned, — so quiet and breathless that even the Chinese god became conscious of a situation and seemed to wait in bronze apprehension for *something*, he knew not what. Leone, in her becushioned divan, smiled — and waited. Belle's voice came first, low and shocked.

" Do you realize what it is you 've done, Leone? Are you absolutely sure of your ground? "

" Quite. As sure as one can be of anything in this naughty world. I 'm glad, my dear, you understand at last."

"It was indelicate. It was not the act of a lady. It was shockingly merciless of you, Leone!" Warring notes in the subdued pleasant melody of Belle's voice caused it to vibrate, but Leone's self-righteousness did not heed.

"I am not merciless — and I need no one to tell me what a lady may do. She may do anything she wishes if the circumstances justify it or call for it. I did my duty by society, which draws the line sharply against that particular kind of folly — and wisely! Society regards such persons as a menace, and I am quite of a mind with society."

"Oh, I never doubted it for an instant. And the man in the case, that despicable Elsner? How does your ruthless sense of duty to society propose to treat him?"

Leone waved airy disclaimer with both hands, including the fan.

"He is a man, and the same rule does not apply. You know that. Of course I disapprove, but I can do nothing, for the question of blame was all cut out and fitted long

before my time. It was unfeeling, to be sure, to fit it to the woman, but at least the woman need never wear it unless she chooses."

Belle had risen. Her flounces and gathers adjusted themselves with a falling swish, and her boa with its stole of expensive black fox tails brushed gently against the Buddha's cheek. Her dear worldly luxurious self, which was all there unchanged, seemed to have expanded into a beautiful Madonna-like tenderness of protection, and Leone with her little Chinese slippers, her little ivory fan, and her little ruthless, scandal-loving, attenuated moralities, shrank into instant insignificance. Like some clear eyed, wide visioned goddess Belle stood above her and delivered herself.

" Listen to me, Leone Hepburn Cleworth. I 've the right to talk to you, for I 've been intimately acquainted with you for ten years — and I know you. You can do something. You *must!* You are directly responsible. Disgorge that German, my dear friend. He is nothing to you, only a mere caprice, and Clara is paying too heavily for it. Oh,

you 're a pattern of all the proprieties, Leone; I freely admit it. But do you think that society, which you have drawn so pitiless and so arbitrary in its judgments, is blind? There are some things which it will not endure. It will not hesitate to call your conduct by its right name."

The fan had ceased to flicker, and hovered curiously poised in the air, but Leone still lay indolently back. "And that is — Don't hesitate yourself, Bella, on my account."

"Treachery at least, if nothing worse," said Belle unmoved. There were evidences that she rather enjoyed this moment, but as she sped this last dart she moved, stately, toward the door.

But Leone was on her feet now. She brought down the sheafed fansticks with a sharp, peremptory crack on the Buddha's head; her eyes were wide open and flashing; the last trace of her languor was gone. She cared nothing for reproof; she was a law unto herself. But she did not choose that the enemy should retire from the field with colors flying.

"Bella, how dare you say such a thing to me? You have gone too far. You know perfectly well I don't care a turn of my finger for any German in New York, and as for Clara and her affairs, I shall go my way without the least reference to either. I have never considered the one or the other at any time, and I certainly shall not begin to now."

"The German is Clara's affair, I believe," great, clean-hearted Belle retorted from the door. "You don't consider him? Then send him back to her. Treat him as you have seen proper to treat her. Don't discriminate, and he will go back to her fast enough. Then your responsibility in the case will be ended."

"My responsibility in the case does not exist. I deny it. And I utterly decline to defend my actions to you or to any one on earth," said Leone with crushing dignity.

But with Belle the quarrel was a climax, in which long and secret vexation of spirit and innate scorn of Leone and her ways would no more be repressed. She hesitated

for a barely perceptible moment by the door, then drew it open with an irrevocable swing.

"Belle, you shall not go like that! Come back and apologize to me for the things you have said."

But Belle was already across the threshold. She had the genuine American courage of her convictions, and she paused only long enough to send back the unexpected retort: "Good-by. If I were in a mood for apologies I might offer one *for* you, perhaps. You need it; but you have n't the grace or the perspicacity to do it for yourself, apparently!"

CHAPTER XI

AN ILL-TIMED ACCIDENT

As Belle passed swiftly down the silent stairway and through the hall, quite pretentious for a house of the size, her eye was caught by the twinkle of a torn fragment of white near the door. It held her with painful interest till she stood above it, reading — as with sure premonition she had expected to read — the mutilated latter half of Miss Manning's name. The servant was nowhere in evidence, her own descent having been so sudden and unheralded, so stooping down hurriedly she picked up the insulted fragment in a whirl of indignation quite unusual for her, and swinging the door open for herself walked independently away.

In the stormy close of her interview with Leone a great deal had been said in a very few minutes, and she half expected to see Clara still somewhere in the vicinity. In that

event Belle would have followed from sheer impulse of sympathy, without any clear idea of what she wished to say or do, the unbelievable enormity of the beam which she knew to be in Leone's eye disposing her to overlook at the moment the good-sized mote that might be in Clara's.

Clara had disappeared, however, and Belle, to whom the cooling December air had suggested tempering secondary considerations, femininely admitted to herself that possibly it was better so, and took the next train down town, thinking deeply.

But poor Clara neither knew nor cared in the least about Miss Werner's feelings. Had she done so she might readily have agreed, for she had reached that sorry stage at which one learns to philosophize at one's own expense. She was walking rapidly northward along an avenue that would have been crowded in warmer weather; she was not a remarkable figure, but the desperate unhappiness of her blue eyes and white face would have attracted the attention of any one accustomed to observe such things. Home

lay in this direction, and she was blindly obeying the instinct of all stricken creatures to run thither. She had seen the torn fragment of her name flutter from the hand of Leone's man-servant as he ushered her from the house after delivering that message which they both knew to be false; and her ready fears had instantly leaped to the right conclusion. By day and night for weeks she had lived in fear, learning to watch unconscious shades of expression, to study tones of the voice and invest them by and by with a meaning that was torture. It was only the expected and dreaded that had finally happened; and that it had come at last by Leone's hand seemed but a natural part of the weight of injustice and misery. Poor thing, she remembered hearing many a time that suspense was worse and harder to endure than actual trouble, but the fierce tumult of dread and shame which she was suffering swept the idea aside as trite and foolish. Proverbs were not made to measure such trouble as hers. For her this was merely the beginning.

Snow clouds were drifting down the sky from the north, and the wind had grown more stinging. It was not a day to choose for walking, but Clara was unconscious of the cold, or the passer-by, or the stray groups of children on the sidewalk whom she passed almost without seeing. She was crossing a smooth asphalted street in the nineties when the first happening of which she had any distinct knowledge occurred. She was stopped, by a shock as sudden as though a blow had been struck her in the chest, as an automobile shot across her path, so close that the air suction behind almost whirled her down and under. Glancing upward she had a flashing glimpse of Elsner's face. Now he had checked the machine, and whirling about, was coming back to her, looking, it seemed to her afflicted fancy, ruthlessly handsome and strong and happy, though in reality his face was no less white than hers.

She stood quite still until he came. Her very misery gave her a certain advantage over him, for she had already forgotten her

bare escape from death at his hands, while in his mind it was naturally the uppermost idea. His voice was harsh with condensed fright as he brought the automobile to a stand.

"Did n't you hear the gong?" he asked gratingly.

She did not heed. His voice had often been harsh lately, and she expected nothing else now. "Take me up. I am coming with you," she said in a low voice of command, without answering his question.

He helped her up beside him and wrapped the rugs about her with a solicitude he rarely showed her of late. It was chiefly gratitude at his escape from a tragedy. Yet her poor little flash of spirit had won his admiration for the moment. Perhaps if she had loved him less she might have made of her own indifference a tether to hold him more securely.

"Where shall we go, Clara?" he asked, half conciliatory.

"Wherever you were going; it is of no consequence where. I have something to

say to you," she answered, refusing the advance his manner made. The depth of her trouble gave her for the time a poise and force which he felt strongly; and man-like he grew instantly more anxious to please her.

"This way, then. Wrap up, and we 'll go for a spin up the Drive if you think you won't be too cold. You 've not been in my new car before, have you? I have wanted for some days to take you — but I — things have somehow kept preventing, you know."

They were rounding into the great driveway, bounded by black bare trees and the wide, gray tossing river, over whose surface white foamcrests were gleaming for an instant and vanishing. The chance for recrimination that his words offered was so strong that Clara's lips actually trembled, but she knew already the uselessness of that, and instead came straight to the point.

"I have been insulted, Paul."

He started wrathfully. "What?"

"Yes." She nodded her head, looking not at him, but at the long bleak stretch

ahead. There was more telling, helpless pathos in this unstudied, simple appeal than many words could have rendered; and all the good that was in the man went out to her promptly in response.

"Who dared insult you, Clara?" he inquired darkly, though he had an instant sure divination of what the answer would be.

"You know, Paul; *she* did." The girl glanced round at him briefly and the attempted stoicism of her pale blue eyes was an unutterable reproach to him.

"Tell me about it, dear — tell me everything," he gently urged her.

His indignation was the sweetest balm he could have offered, and she told him with hot, unreserved conviction the circumstances of her ordeal at Leone's hands. The tale of the torn card he was swift to interpret, and his gorge rose instantly, but less now in sympathy with her than in wild revolt at that indomitable scorn of which he was himself a victim. A sudden mad spurt of the machine replied to his inward fury. He had grievances of his own which he had not

seen fit to impart to Clara. The smouldering recollection of his humiliation at Cleworth's hands leaped to a climax, and his passion for Leone seemed to shrivel and pass away on the wings of a whirlwind.

"Insolent! She 's a devil!" he whispered hoarsely between his teeth, "a smiling, yellow-eyed little devil; but if I live she shall pay her debts. She must have a heart somewhere, I suppose, like any other tigress. I 'll dig till I come to it, and see if I can't give it a wring or two. I believe I know the trick."

"No, no, Paul, no. Stop!" Clara clung to him, terrified. His outburst frightened her, and the little auto-car was bounding and trembling under the strain he was putting on it, and the trees were flying past in a continuous blurred succession like a line of unfired skyrockets. Clara could not understand. That in the same hour he could seem so cold, yet wax so vehement over her wrongs, was an incongruity she shrank from fathoming. "Don't see her, Paul — don't go near her again. Only leave her

alone, and I shall be happy. Oh, do stop; we shall be arrested for going at such a pace — and it frightens me!"

Like lightning diverted to an unexpected safe conductor his anger flashed about and scathed her. He hated her then no less than Leone.

"Let up. Don't be silly. Don't hold me like that. I will not let you be hurt. Why in Heaven's name don't you get a little bit of her deviltry into you? You sicken me with those Nancy ways of yours."

The girl withdrew from him, trembling and coloring with womanly offense at his violence. Yet she might not resent now as she would have done once, since it was part of her expiation that he might offend with impunity while she did not dare to offend. She retorted with a pitiful attempt at dignity, "I have never felt your admiration for that kind of deviltry."

"Nichts. The Lord forbid;" he laughed savagely, slackening speed somewhat. "I don't desire you should, and you have n't the backbone in any case. You 're a good little

thing, Clara; so good that at times you 're even a trifle tiresome."

"Take me home!" she cried with a voiceless sob. Her fragile hold upon him had been broken in some incomprehensible way, and his ruthless injustice overwhelmed all her powers of self-defense. "I have done no wrong. I came to you for sympathy, and you have abused me," she cried again in bewildered grief.

His wrath was so far spent that he could see the wrong-headedness of the course himself. As has been said, love with him was primarily pursuit, yet he had some feeling of protection still left for this helpless quarry, and that purer and better part of him that had not bowed to the shackles of his new fancy was hers still. Moreover, he had not utterly relinquished that regard for honor which a man may still cherish side by side with most incompatible motives. He made a strong effort therefore, and turning his back upon the secret cause of his irritation, remembered his duty. He had always expected to perform it.

" Listen, Clara. I don't wish to abuse you, — you know better than that; and as for my sympathy, we will arrange matters so that no one will ever dare to treat you that way again. We must marry, my girl, at once; then if those sweet friends of ours have anything to say I 'll be in a position to answer them. What do you say, Clara?"

Her reply was the strangest and most piteous on a girl's lips. " Oh, yes; you really mean it, Paul?" It was so long since he had last spoken of their wedding day that the idea had grown fearfully remote. But he seemed determined to atone now for everything, even to the unexpected kindness of an attempt to relieve her from the onus of her poor admission.

" Mean it? — of course I do! You don't find it so strange, I hope; you know this is n't the first time I 've asked you, — is it? The matter is in your hands, Clara, as it has always been. I may not sometimes have done right as I intended to do it, but at least I am no rogue."

Belief in himself and some real repentance

gave his voice an echo of that true-loverly ring she had so long missed. Perhaps he knew the tender-heartedness of his audience also. For it was so wondrously sweet to be wooed again when the whole world had seemed to scorn that she could no longer remember any wrong he had done her. She would have forgiven a thousand wrongs, and gone on her knees around the world to justify his love. She said nothing, but her smile and the tears in it would have made of the best speech a clumsy thing.

Her gentle humility charmed the laggard lover.

"This is Friday — suppose we say Monday, Clara? — could you be ready then?" he asked gently. Often afterwards he felt glad when he remembered that he had spoken gently to her, though he was not to receive an answer. They were rapidly approaching a street on the corner of which stood a fashionable apartment house with windows overlooking the Drive. A sound in the street challenged their attention at the same instant. They had heard it distantly

for a moment or two before, but only as one unconsciously disregards noises in the city, and had given it no thought until now, when it leaped at once with ominous distinctness into their near neighborhood. The projecting house corner hid them for a second, but around it and straight down upon them was dashing a panic-stricken uproar of horses' hoofs and grinding carriage wheels. They were in a spur of the road where only two vehicles could pass each other in safety, and that with careful handling. Clara sat as if frozen, for death was in the sound, while Elsner, among whose sins cowardice at least had no place, was jamming down the brakes with all his might, and whispering to her through the accompaniment of thrashing hoofs and rending, smashing glass and furniture, "A runaway! Sit quite still, Clara; don't be afraid."

Round the corner came an instant's vision of two plunging black horses with blood-rimmed nostrils and ears laid back; then the vehicles met with a roar. The horses wrenched free in a moment and dashed on to

further activities, but to the man and woman lying inert a few feet apart by the roadside, everything was blank for the present.

In New York a crowd gathers as if by magic. Much less than a minute brought together a group of policemen, hall boys, children, and the inquisitive but helpful butcher's boy, without whom nothing of importance ever happens uptown. And thither also in haste, but bent upon her own affairs and unconscious of disaster, came Miss Belle Werner.

Her mood was secretly more than a little ruffled at the moment. One must needs be an angel not to feel ruffled when one discovers that the silk one has just taken a tiresome journey downtown to match has been left at home uptown, and one must tramp foolishly back for it. But the cause of the oversight was become the most sensitive spot of the matter, for since her encounter with Leone Belle had been wondering what view that Puritan might take of her own interest in Cleworth's affairs, and the reflection was making her unhappy. Her

own griefs were forgotten, however, when she came upon the group by the roadside.

"Why, it 's Clara!" she cried to the sympathetic, staring crowd, who took the news naturally as a family announcement, and regarded her with interest. A policeman at whom she looked explained with an unusual air of respect that an ambulance had been summoned, and would arrive at any moment. Something quite unconscious in her attitude had led him to volunteer the information.

But Belle was looking down fascinated on Clara's still, white face, and recalling the tragedy of the torn card and the girl's merciless baiting at Leone's hands. Indignation and pity almost maternal inspired her anew; she snapped her mental fingers at Leone and the canons of society.

"And meantime you intend to just stand round and do nothing, I suppose," she flashed impertinently at the policeman, who was in no way to blame. Her eye lighted on two colored attendants from her own house, who sprang forward with ready officiousness to do her bidding. "Here you, Lee and Burt,

take up the lady—very carefully—and bring her upstairs to our apartment. She is a friend of mine. These policemen may help you if they wish."

The policemen helped, hardly believing that they did so. Near by, Elsner was lying as he had been thrown, but already showing signs of recovery; and the bearers glanced at him in passing. The day was cold. Should not the gentleman also be brought into the house until the ambulance arrived?

But Belle was suddenly colder than the weather. She cast one glance upon the sufferer to make certain that he was not dead, then passed haughtily on, her feet disdaining the very stones he lay on. "No. Send him to the hospital — if they will take him in. He will have the advantage at least of being unknown there."

The hospital took Elsner in, as she had opined that it might. He remained there only a few hours, however, not being seriously hurt; but Clara was not so fortunate. A long fever set in after the shock, and she lay in Belle's home for weeks delirious. Mrs.

Manning came to nurse her daughter, and so learned from Clara's own wandering talk the wrong she had suffered at Elsner's hands.

It was a terrible blow to Mrs. Manning, who despite the family's poverty and misfortunes was properly proud. The doctors said that the mental strain Clara had been through was responsible, more than the accident, for her long illness; and meantime the sorry tragedy of her life was played on for a while without her — her part in it having always been such a secondary, unimportant part that she was scarcely missed.

ness transaction. If she detected in him so much as a hint of complacency regarding her share in it she would take special pains to eradicate it, and would forever after hate him. Men were sure to be very much alike at heart, she reasoned, with Elsner in mind.

Into the darkened sickroom, where Mrs. Manning wept in the shadow beside her daughter's head, a maid crept softly, and, touching Belle on the shoulder, beckoned her away. Out in the hall stood Mr. Thompson Werner, with a face of genial solemnity. He was much distressed by the accident to Clara, and being stout, his endeavor to reduce his voice to a whisper lest she be disturbed was costing him no little effort.

"Bella," he whispered now, "you 'll have to go into the parlor. Cleworth 's there. He wants to see you a minute about something; I fancy it 's those shares of yours. You 'd really better sell out to him, my dear, he looks badly broken up — the boy is in a desperately tight place, I 'm afraid."

"I can't go," Belle answered, abjectly whispering also, not on Clara's account but

on Cleworth's. "I 'm too much needed in here. You 'll have to see him, poppa."

"My dear, I can't. It 's no use; you 'll have to go yourself. He as good as told me just a moment ago that he had no desire to see me. Besides, I can't act for you in such a matter as that, you know."

"Yes, you can. It is n't about Union Central, for I have n't a share left. You made such a time about it last night that I sold out to him completely before opening time this morning."

"Eh? you did after all? Then I certainly won't go in." In his surprise Mr. Thompson Werner almost forgot to whisper, till Belle took him by the lapel of his coat and shook him back into remembrance.

"Poppa, don't be so idiotic. He only wants to thank me — can't you see? You can attend to it just as well as I can."

"I assure you I shall do nothing of the kind, Bella," said her father firmly, and walked away, the bald spot on the top of his head gathering more of lustre and determination the further he receded from her.

Abandoned thus cruelly, Belle gathered up her recent theories, and throwing them quickly in front of her as a bulwark, advanced to greet Cleworth. She thought him financially safe now, and rather than allow him to suspect her weakness she was prepared to be cruel.

She need not have feared him, however. She realized that the moment they met, and her warlike purpose leaned mollified on its arms and waited. Physically he seemed to-night strangely like that younger Irving Cleworth who had been her most frequent caller just a few long years ago. His smile was grave and contained, as she so well remembered it. But the valley of financial disaster had cast its haggard shadow on him, and he wore the indefinable air of a man who has learned to fear defeat. Belle perceived it; but she had never before met it in the presence of any of the men she knew, and strove vainly to name it to herself while they greeted each other.

"I wanted to thank you — or to try to, Belle. You saved my head this morning. It

was squarely on the block when your reprieve arrived and stopped the proceedings."

"Indeed? Why, Irve, I had no idea your head was in such a predicament," she said, smiling and fencing, as one is sometimes glad to do, with the real underlying earnestness.

"Yes. It was a bad minute for me. You could even see the glitter of the sun on the uplifted axe. Seriously, I was in a painfully tight place, the worst I 've ever been in in my life, and I want to thank the friendship and generosity that helped me out of it."

Belle at once held out her hand and smiled winsomely. If he was to regard this as a mere business transaction she must not let the conversation become too serious.

"Meaning me, I suppose? Don't, Irve. My generosity made a good deal of money out of the transaction, you forget, and I cannot accept any more thanks really; it would be deliberate sailing under false colors. Besides" — she stopped, and smiled now with provocation.

"You could have made a great deal more if you had wished," said Cleworth humbly. "Besides what?"

"Well, I 'm afraid I 'm sailing under false colors already. I hate to admit it, but you 're really thanking the wrong person all this time."

"How so?" Her heart quickened to see on his face what he was wholly unconscious of betraying, — a shade of disappointment, — but she kept on.

"It was not my idea at all. It was pop-pa's doing entirely."

"You mean he told you, of course. Only you could have given the order."

"I mean it was his doing altogether. He was so unpleasant about it. I assure you I would n't have thought of it, but he ranted at me to such an extent that there was nothing else left me to do."

She did not see that she was undermining her own theory of a "mere business transaction." As well as she could she sustained his grave, searching glance, which seemed to pierce silently right through her

pretense. It was better that he should believe the lie than suspect the truth now.

"Did he rant at you?" he said quietly. "I am extremely sorry — it was scarcely worth that. But even that does not exonerate you." Then he uncovered her prevarication: "Belle, if he told you about it you did know what a predicament I was in."

"Oh well, of course, but not such a predicament — the one affecting your head, I mean." She laughed, but crimsoned all over her dark clear cheeks and neck. Why was he looking at her so? He had never given her a look like that. Was it possible either was forgetting, even for a moment, that he was Leone's husband? She must remind him of it; must rally her old impertinent aplomb to help them both; must — But she had grown strangely confused herself.

"I think — Irve, you must want to see poppa, don't you? Of course, you'd better see him; it was quite his doing. I'll send him in." Such a senseless speech for Miss Werner, but nothing better would come, and smiling nervously she swept with shat-

tered dignity out of the room and left him there.

Mr. Thompson Werner was in his room, cogitating on the astounding information he had received, and experiencing a vague sensation most unpleasantly like that of a hound at fault. He even wondered uneasily whether he might not be growing old, that he should be so at a loss for a clue to events which seemed to be going on under his nose. There was only one clue that he could think of — outside of the merest caprice — and that one was utterly, absolutely impossible. Had not Cleworth been a married man these two years? His Bella was far too wholesome a girl to be the victim of an unrequited love for any man.

His fatherly susceptibilities were once more rudely jarred at this point. The door opened swiftly yet quietly, and Belle was in the room. He rose hurriedly as she came straight across to him, her cheeks flushed and her dark eyes alight with some strongly repressed emotion which, rightly or wrongly, wakened every fibre of his partial old heart

into sympathetic response. He could not altogether understand, but this was his dear splendid daughter, and no matter what befell, he was hers to command. She took him again by the lapel of his coat, and shook it imperiously and half hysterically back and forth to emphasize her words.

"You must go in, poppa! I told you you should have gone at first. Mr. Cleworth insists on seeing you. He's very much affected by his business troubles, I think, and he'll say queer things probably, but you must agree with him. Agree with everything, no matter what he says, and don't dare — poppa, mind you don't dare — to contradict any rambling statement he may see fit to make. If you do, you and I will have a misunderstanding."

Despite her incomprehensibility she was fearfully in earnest. Her eyes were flashing, but there were tears in them now.

"Lord bless me, Bella," he cried anxiously, "explain a little. Bella, look here, explain to me, won't you?"

"There's nothing whatever to explain.

He is not dangerously affected. Please hurry," she whispered hastily back over her shoulder. Then she was gone.

Mr. Thompson Werner went slowly down the hall to do his duty. His brain was in a cloud. Some one's sanity had temporarily gone by the board. It might be Cleworth's, but he was still more solicitous about Belle's; and he was not wholly free from some uncomfortable misgivings about his own. Cleworth had seemed to be all right ten minutes ago. And if he was n't — what in the world was the best way to take the poor fellow?

Cleworth did not appear particularly anxious to see him. He seemed to be abstractedly studying the cover of a book, which he laid down nervously as his host entered; and Mr. Thompson Werner noted with fresh misgiving that it was upside down. Perhaps Bella was right enough, after all! He smiled in his kindest manner and took a light hold of Cleworth's elbow.

"Wanted to see me, Irve, did you, old man?"

Cleworth turned suddenly to look at him.

His manner was not at all violent, his host perceived with relief, but his answer showed plainly that his wits were straying.

"To see you? Oh, yes, so I did. I owe you a thousand thanks, Werner, for your timely interference in my affairs. It was a friendly act of yours to overlook in my behalf your natural family interests. Believe me, I appreciate it extremely."

The stiffness of the speech did not elucidate matters at all for Mr. Werner. He opened his mouth to deny, but remembering his orders, suddenly closed it again, and only smiled and nodded, while the suppression of his honest feelings made him grow red in the face. "Don't mention it, my boy," he said feebly, feeling that *that* surely must be a harmless, safe remark to make.

"I could n't think of not mentioning it," Cleworth insisted quietly; "and I 'm deeply indebted to Miss Werner for telling me the exact facts."

"I 'd give a dollar if she 'd told them to me," was her father's internal comment. But he only smiled the more affably while

he wondered what those exact facts might be. Just enough light was percolating through the clouds to render him more cautious than ever. There might be method in Belle's madness, and he must be careful.

"Then," said Cleworth diffidently, as if he knew not how to express what he wished to say, "what I have been told is quite true? I am correctly informed, and am to hold myself indebted to you alone for this?"

A great light like that of the sun at noonday broke upon Mr. Thompson Werner then, though he could not until some time after understand the hesitation and trouble of the young man's face. But like the old thoroughbred that he was, Belle's father grasped the situation in an instant and rose to what was required of him. "Pshaw, my dear fellow — I could n't quite get what you were driving at. Yes, yes — that 's true enough, I suppose — except that there is any indebtedness in the case. You must n't think of it; I was only too pleased," he declared with a smile most genial and comprehensive. Then precipitately catching the

opportunity for honorable retreat: "Say, Irve, don't let 's talk any more of that tommy-rot; I 'm sick of the Street and everything about it. Did Belle tell you about poor Clara Manning? She 's here with us, you know."

It was breakfast-time the next morning before the old gentleman again saw his daughter. He made no mention whatever of the episode of the night, and no outsider could have guessed from his courtly reticence that he held her secret. But Belle, who knew him, understood, and made acknowledgment of her thanks in a way they two comprehended perfectly. It was just before he went away. She stopped him for a moment in the hall to smooth out the creases in his dear old corpulent waistcoat, and pull it down straight and uncomfortably across his stomach, and to murmur without looking at him, but with real affection in her low musical tones, "Dear old poppa, — d' you know you 're getting most tremendously fat?"

CHAPTER XIII

ELSNER TAKES CHANCES

CLEWORTH walked home after his brief interview with the old man in a state of tingling exaltation. Even the fateful shadow of the Street was for a while forgotten. Shamed by the bounding of his own blood, by his quickened step, by the fictitious glory that lay upon all the world — he was yet powerless to control any of them. As by an instantaneous mental flashlight he had seen something in himself of which he had never even dreamed. He had discovered it by the light of that confused glance wherein his eyes and Belle's had questioned each other, and her dark ones had grown darker for looking, and her dear cheeks crimson. How long had it been there? — God knew. Not long, he hoped. For he was as honest as most men, and though he could not banish thought or

suppress that superb elation, still he was troubled. He was conscience-stricken that the dividing line between good and evil should be so narrow, and that he could innocently have come so near to overstepping it.

He had not seen Leone since their quarrel the previous evening, and it was the first sign of his integrity that he recalled the omission now, and felt a disproportionate compunction over it. He determined to be reconciled, and on arriving at home went up at once to her room, his bearing slipping, in spite of his efforts, into one of apology. So true is it that the consciousness of frailty in ourselves makes us tolerant toward the faults in others.

Leone sat in a chintz-covered rocking-chair, her small feet crossed peacefully before the gas-log fire, for the night was cold. She had been reading, but the book had fallen on her lap, and her face, illumined and glowing from the diffused warmth, was very serious. Cleworth's heart misgave him as he saw her. Undoubtedly she was grieving over

their quarrel, and his impending business troubles. His compunction increased.

He stooped over the chintz-covered chair, and, as bashfully as ever he had done it as a bridegroom, kissed her cheek. She looked up.

"Were you worrying, Leone?" he asked as he dropped into a seat. "Don't do it any more just now; I may be able to pull through all right after all. A queer thing happened to-day."

She looked at him with an intent, curious interest which he did not understand, but which his conscience charged guiltily to the thing that he knew of. Then he told her faithfully of the help that had come, crediting Mr. Thompson Werner with his full share in it, and wondering whether the transaction would strike her as at all remarkable. But her interest had waned; it was apparent that she was merely listening politely.

"Belle told me; she was here this morning. She neglected to say, though, that her father had had a hand in the business;" Leone laughed indulgently. "I rather think

Belle does n't object to posing a little once in a while."

Belle had certainly appeared to pose that morning in the matter of Clara, but it was best not to revert to that now. Leone went on quickly, not noting Cleworth's averted, flushed face.

"I was so relieved that I simply telegraphed to the agent for the Van Water cottage that we should want the place by about the middle of January. Your troubles always turn out well in the end, Irve, don't they?"

While she spoke Cleworth had suddenly stiffened with amazement and wrath. He could scarcely believe her to be in earnest. "Leone!" he cried in a voice that misery had sharpened, "Leone, can't I make you comprehend? It is not the end of my troubles. I have been helped over the difficulty by the merest generosity of others. Does n't that hurt your self-respect? You can't keep on like this, indulging your extravagant desires on sufferance, so to speak, while the world knows I am being pushed to the wall.

Don't you see that? You 'll have to give up this idea; it is sheer lunacy."

"It hurts my self-respect extremely when you speak so to me," Leone answered slowly; "but as for anything else — people have to help each other sometimes. I know it is being done constantly, and there is no disgrace attached to it. One has to live" — She paused, flirting the leaves of the book in deep displeasure. At last he rose resolutely.

"I see you don't understand. I think very probably you can't. Understand this then: you must countermand those orders — stop everything at once. Say I won't be responsible, and there 'll be no further trouble. Van Water's man, whoever he is, will understand at least."

She sat very quietly, with her hands clasped in her lap and in her face a look of disappointment almost piteous. She did not look round or move. Cleworth lingered uncertainly by the door, baffled in the moment of victory.

"If you cannot do things like other peo-

ple," she began in a whispering voice, "it is not my fault. I, too, can understand a little, and I know that I have wanted nothing out of the way — nothing but what all my friends expect to have. When a man takes a position in society which he cannot uphold, and denies his wife the amusements and duties proper to her station, he is a pretender. He must expect to be thought one."

It was her summing up of the position as she saw it, and as there would not be lacking others to see it. Cleworth saw that side too, and miserably winced at it.

"Everybody has his own side, of course; I suppose that 's the one you look at," he said huskily. "I 'm sorry — I 've done the best I knew how, Leone." Then he closed the door till it clicked softly, and went away dejected by his triumph.

Leone submitted to the inevitable with a very bad grace, and for many days following he saw little of her. But he also kept away from the Werners' house as though the plague was there. Though he was a pre-

tender his pretenses should at least be honest. He would do no wrong that he could help doing. Rather than submit Belle to any vulgar complications of that kind he would keep himself forever out of her sight.

And disasters one after another fell upon him every day, as though from some malignant hand that was bent upon obliterating him. In spite of his most desperate efforts his difficulties increased. He was caught in the ebb tide of his fortunes, and though he struggled and fought with all the shrewdness and experience that had helped him onward before, every day saw him swept a little further down and out. Sometimes in those days he thought wistfully of his wife. If they two had been standing shoulder to shoulder now things might have come easier to both. He made an advance to her one day, but she repulsed him so coldly that he was careful not to repeat it.

About Christmas time, however, Leone emerged from the grayness of disappointment, and in reprisal went upon a prolonged shopping tour. At Pelton's one could es-

cape from the vulgar overdone decorations of the shops, that make the good day haggard and shopworn ere it dawns, and Leone went there to lunch and took a vindictive sort of comfort in the quiet expensiveness of it. And the special devil that presides over the bickerings of married folk administered a timely jog to events and sent thither also Elsner.

They perceived each other simultaneously. Leone bowed across her table — a bow that defiantly ignored any idea of late unpleasantness. The man betrayed his better memory by an instant dark flush, but he unhesitatingly threaded his way across to her.

He wore a surgeon's plaster on one temple still, a reminder of his accident. Every day he went dutifully to inquire for Clara, but he was not allowed to see her, and already his penitence had cooled toward her, and she had dropped far into the background of things that interested him. He was feeling a great necessity for diversion of some kind.

He found it. Leone was charming.

"We have been so anxious about you ever since we saw the account in the paper," she declared, smiling as though she had never seen him ushered out of the house by her irate husband; and Elsner forgave her the incident for her unwinking audacity. It was that which had from the first attracted him to her.

He was audacious himself, however, and he was tired of being humbled by her. His ardor roused anew at the sight of her — viciously beautiful, sham little Puritan that she was. She was worth the chase. And Clara was far away.

"Yes, we were fortunate, I suppose, in not being killed;" he paused that his first shot might take good effect; "you have not asked me about Clara, I believe," he said deliberately.

The flash of Leone's yellow brown eyes should have satisfied him if he sought to shock her. She reared her head — like a pretty colt under the lash, he thought.

"I beg your pardon; I was coming to

that. Such a painful thing — I naturally hesitated about intruding."

Oh, she knew what to say. He laughed.

"I talk of Clara to her friends. Don't pretend you're one," he said in a low voice. "Ah, you're angry now, aren't you?"

If he had thought for a moment that she would rise and go away from him he would not have said such things. He was keenness itself for her. But was she not the woman who had bestowed risky confidences upon him one day and played Puritan the next? He would be humbugged no longer. He would unmask the little hypocrite.

Decidedly she was angry, however.

"How dare you!" she said fiercely; "did you not invite me to speak about Clara?"

"No — did I? Pardon me; I would greatly prefer to talk about you to-day. I have no wish to speak about any one else."

The waiter came, and he delivered a long order at length. Angrily she remained, as he had known she would. She had but one furious idea in the world that instant — to force him at any cost to that lowly respect-

ful plane from which other men were accustomed to admire her, and which he had always refused to occupy. But immediately when they were alone again his ardor flashed forth undisguised; he was not all disdain and unbelief in her, as she well knew.

"Forgive me; it is so long since I have seen you — years," he said eagerly. "Tell me about the cottage; I want to know whether you were pleased with it."

She wished to utterly scorn him, but the memory of that grievance was too strong for her.

"I — yes; but I 've given it up again. I abandoned the idea about a week ago," she said shortly.

"You gave it up? Why, may I ask?"

She hesitated. To discuss Cleworth's decision with this disrespectful pirate would be a further yielding to him. Yet the sense of injustice was great. She wanted the sympathy and justification which she knew awaited her here. She yielded at last. "Yes, you may ask, I suppose; there 's no law against it. My husband did not approve,"

she said, looking away from him to the window drearily.

"Yet you wished it very much, did you not?" All the sympathy she had longed for was in his tone now.

"Very much;" she nodded her head forlornly. At sight of the chagrin that had fluttered across her angry beauty all Elsner's latent passion leaped up, but he looked judicially at the table. It was needful to be on guard with her. She would turn Puritan again on the instant if he was not careful.

"Cleworth is harsh," he said slowly. "Of what could he have disapproved?"

"Oh, it was the cost. He is in difficulties of some kind, I believe; he usually is, lately. There is n't any use in discussing it. We 'd better talk about something else."

But the steely blue eyes were regarding her too intently. She did not meet them; she felt at a disadvantage, and would like now to have stepped back upon the highest step of her pedestal again, but it had suddenly grown impossible. She raised quick-flashing, startled eyes that endeavored to defy him,

but dropped them again swiftly as she heard her name in scarcely audible tones — audible only through the burden of the caress in them.

"Dearest lady," he whispered with a low burst of passion, "I have a story to tell you. It is about two people we both know. One was a man. Because of a deed he once did" —

"Stop!" she raised her hand, trying hard under the mask of flippancy to regain the control she had lost; "some stories have morals, Mr. Elsner. Is there one in this?"

"It shall have no moral at all unless you wish. After you have heard it you must judge," he answered rather roughly. She looked across the table swiftly; her eyes were only half displeased.

"The story, then," she murmured under her breath, knowing she was slipping — slipping.

"Because of a deed he had done this man was for years a helpless prisoner of circumstances. Yet he had his life and his liberty, and the world was all before him, and it

was an aggravation of his sentence that he was apparently quite free to enjoy them. But unfortunately for himself he had already learned what these things may mean to a man when they come accompanied by wealth. Before the unfortunate act I have mentioned, he had been, not rich exactly, but of means sufficient to know life at its sweetest and take the best it brought. Ah — there was so much. But afterwards he was poor. When he looked at the world then it was as a convict looks through the prison bars. He could still see the things that used to be his once; he could even move among them and make miserable belief that they were his, but he could not posses them because of the bars of circumstances. Leone — you can understand what that man felt?"

She flushed hotly at the name but nodded silently; the descent was steep. Elsner's whispered tale ran on more vehemently.

"You know who the man was. He came out of his prison at last, with means considerably greater than before, and vowing to make amends for those years lost out of his

life. But he had seen a fellow prisoner — a woman — a lovely, ruthless, respectable little hypocrite who for mere convention's sake utterly scorned him. He loved her; he was her slave. There was something hard and untamable about her that was like himself. But for all her pride and self-will she remained a helpless prisoner of circumstances as he had been, and at last one day he defied her and went to her bluntly, saying: 'I love you. Leave conventions to the fools who make them, and come. — I am your fitting mate. I have all that you want. Love, take it of me.'"

She was looking at him now unfalteringly; her eyes which had widened suddenly when he called her a hypocrite glowing like a beautiful enraged feline's, her cheeks burning under his ardor. He returned the look unflinchingly, and waited. His story was ended.

"And what did the lady say to the proposal?" she asked with a steady voice.

"Ah, I don't know. You know her even better than I do. You know how she feels.

Leone, it is for you to tell me what she said," he answered, almost entreatingly now.

" Oh no, it is not. I cannot tell anything of how she felt because I have never been a helpless prisoner of circumstances. I have never longed miserably for things I could not have. I have always taken them. If I ever *were* in the position of your lady I might disregard the conventions and say 'Yes,' perhaps, even though I scorned the man. But being in my position, for the same reason I should answer him, 'No, I thank you. Your bars are myths. I have never found that they hindered me for a moment from anything I was determined to have. Whatever I want of the world I will take for myself.' "

Her anger — she knew it in herself — was not because he had made a dishonorable proposal to her, but because he had called her " a lovely, ruthless, respectable little hypocrite." Like live topazes her eyes flashed upon him, but only made him the madder with desire to conquer her. He was infatuated with the clear-cut, unhurried mobility

of her lips while speaking; he was carried away by the impulse to kiss them as they moved so superciliously; but in that publicity he could only devour his imagination and watch them.

"If you ever *were* in the position of that lady you might say 'Yes'?" he repeated huskily. And the mocking lips curled themselves slowly into the smile he both loved and hated, while they finished the quotation for him.

—"even although I scorned the man. Yes—perhaps. I had no suspicion that I was a hypocrite until you said so—but I believe I could be one under those circumstances."

She had finished her luncheon and was quickly collecting her odds and ends of paraphernalia and preparing to go. She could not in decency of course remain after his outbreak, but no onlooker would have guessed anything of what had passed from her superb demeanor. Elsner watched her with smouldering blue eyes till the fire in them was displaced by a laugh; it was character-

istic of the woman and of his feeling for her that he never thought of apology.

"I *know* you could be one under those circumstances. But believe me you will not. You are willful — it makes you worth while — but you 'll find that I am much stronger of will than you, and when you say 'Yes' to me — beautiful little wildcat Leone — you 'll *mean* it. Why, you 've never felt your own heart beat yet!" he broke forth again with smothered passion; "you don't know what love is! But you 're going to learn one day soon — from me!"

She turned upon him and demanded wrathfully, "How dare you say such things to me!" She could feel even now his boasted domination over her beginning. It was a purely animal attraction; she hated him for it; but it lent a tremor to her low voice. "Do not speak to me again. Don't dare *ever* to speak to me again, or to come near me. I detest you!"

Before he could answer she was gone, but with less precision in her walk and ways than was her wont. With her chin resolutely

elevated and a charming color she halted a passing Broadway car and got in, and immediately fell to reflecting. A gentleman across the aisle, who was a student of human nature, observing the eloquent changes in her face, fell on his part to theorizing on the subtle relation between beauty of form and inward graces and goodness of mind. He was a firm upholder of the doctrine that these two things should go together, and when presently the lady smiled happily to herself he felt that he had found proof. It was a gentle but piquant smile, expressive of great goodwill and sweetness, and the student of human nature, who could not see into the lady's heart, was very excusable. The cause of it all, however, was only Leone's sudden recollection that she had come away from Pelton's forgetting to pay her bill, and that the waiter was probably at that moment presenting it to Mr. Elsner. She was too maliciously well satisfied with the idea to feel any hint of humiliation at it.

CHAPTER XIV

LEONE'S CHOICE

LEONE traveled only a little way in that car. She had mistaken her route in her haste and was bound uptown, whither she had no intention of proceeding at present, so she changed cars promptly for one going to the shopping district.

As it was one of the last few days before Christmas, New York was frantically engaged in endeavoring to spend its money. Women who never carried anything more than a pocketbook at other times meekly burdened themselves with parcels, which persisted in slipping and coming untied and opening themselves out to show their contents to people who did n't want to see. Children, brought downtown by misguided mothers to see the display in the shops, strung themselves by families across the sidewalk, or im-

peded traffic by getting lost in the crowds. And men, the last and least considered in that resort of women, wandered helplessly before the windows gazing and debating; possessed, poor things, of a single fixed idea, — to buy a Christmas present of some kind for *her*, — and anxiously fearful that it might not be the right thing.

The great stores were humming with business. Everywhere was the jollity of the season, the deafening pell-mell of traffic, shoppers wrestling with boisterous winds blowing in off the harbor, and over all the bright bitter weather that keeps metropolitan wits at the sharpest. Leone cast thought behind her and merely lived. This at least she loved and could understand — the pulsating, roaring, money-spending cry of the town, which she heard and responded to as an animal answers the call of the woods.

She had by no means forgotten Elsner, however. She made no attempt to forget him. He lay at the back of everything, the secret irritant stimulus goading her into vicious enjoyment. She was something less

than the woman who heretofore had stood upon her pedestal and virtuously and calmly snubbed him. His brute determination in wooing had roused an animal in her — a lurking lower self that would willingly disregard the question of right and wrong and pit its strength against his for the sheer joy of it. He had called her righteousness hypocrisy, and she hated him for it, and her stubbornness leaped out to fight him, yet half hoped he would prove the stronger. But she neither thought nor reasoned about these things. She merely felt them as an animal might, and was exhilarated by them.

By the attentive glances of the men, she knew she was more than ordinarily beautiful to-day. Excitement had made her so. She felt herself radiant, strong, boundlessly alive. That fierce lower self which Elsner's hand had loosed in her was surprisingly like an animal. She desired to be cruel. It would be a genuine pleasure to injure something — Elsner himself preferably, she hated him so. If only she could do that, her happiness would be complete.

Despite her bitter convictions to the contrary, Cleworth had always kept her well supplied with money. Perhaps his patience dreaded in secret that otherwise she would take it, as she had boasted to Elsner that she would. She was in full career of buying when the afternoon began to wane, and the attendants in the shops began to look white-faced; but she felt no weariness of spirit.

She espied at last a beautiful and costly robe of black lace and lingered before it enviously. Any other day she might have passed on with a regret, for she had no need of it; but this day she would glut passionately every desire of her self-love.

The girl in charge was new, taken on merely to help over the Christmas trade, and angered Leone by seeming stupid and inattentive. However, she came round the counter to show the fabric, and then Leone discovered on a sudden that her purse had vanished.

It had lain beside her muff the instant before. There were people about in plenty,

but none near enough, it seemed to her, to have taken it. She snatched up the muff, turned sharply and scrutinized the girl, who, instantly comprehending, flushed scarlet and looked frightened and uncomfortable.

"Have you lost something?" stammered the girl.

"Yes, my portemonnaie is gone! Do you know anything of it?" asked Leone bitingly.

"I? No, madam. But there are so many people about; perhaps some one has"—

"No, that is impossible. No one has been near enough to touch it. It was there beside the muff this instant when you passed round the end of the counter. I 'm positive you must have seen it."

The girl's face changed from red to white. She was a pale-faced little creature at best, not so well dressed as most shop girls, and her voice shook as she cried—"I did not see it, madam. I don't know anything at all about it. How can it have gone so quickly? Are you quite certain you put it there?"

"Perfectly certain," said Leone coldly.

Her voice was as hard and fine as steel. The loss of the money vexed her, to be sure, but she wanted a victim even more than she wanted the money; and here was — not the victim she would have preferred — but one far safer and easier to hurt. She broke in peremptorily on the girl's frightened protests. "I am going to see the store manager about it. Perhaps you had better come with me and explain to him."

The girl went without a word. But on the way a faint flash of recollection came to Leone's brain, and she raised her hand to a small pocket concealed beneath the long flat ends of her boa. There, unmolested, lay the purse, where she had placed it in a moment's aberration. It had never lain beside the muff as she fancied she had seen it.

But unfortunately for herself the girl had not perceived the movement. Left to herself, Leone would as soon have allowed her to escape as the cat would think of sparing the mouse. There was no longer the excuse of the money; there was only the un-

masked savage desire to victimize. She was a petty tyrant, cut loose from civilizing restraint, and set abroad with the mischievous desire to injure, to hurt. The respectable Mrs. Cleworth knew this in herself but she still kept on.

The firm's diplomatic and gentlemanly manager listened to the charge and expressed great concern at it. He was very polite. Mrs. Cleworth was a considerable personage, whose patronage it was worth the firm's while to keep, and besides, she was a remarkably beautiful woman, whom no man of discernment could fail to admire. He did not think this girl looked like a thief, but to satisfy Mrs. Cleworth he caused her to be searched. Leone would have been better pleased to see her instantly dismissed, but under the business man's sane eye curbed her exuberant mischievousness for policy's sake. Of course the purse was not found. The girl was sent back to her duties with a stern caution to be more alert in future for the welfare of customers, and Leone remained behind to be apologized

to, and to delay the head of the office half an hour consoling and advising her, until finally she consented to be appeased, and went away. The sympathetic but astute manager, however, retained two very distinct ideas; one being that Mrs. Cleworth was a very lovely woman, no doubt; and the other, that there was a mistake somewhere, but what it might be he did not wish to investigate too closely.

Night had fallen, but the riotous exaltation of spirit which had obsessed her had not yet abated. Sheer physical exhaustion induced her to think of going home. All New York was turning thitherward wearily; the great city was stretching itself like a man whose day's work is done. But the people of New York, in the constant effort that is forced on them to detach and safeguard their own interests from the hurly-burly of affairs, have grown selfishly and sublimely abstracted and indifferent to the spectacle of themselves. From the office buildings far downtown the express trains rattle overhead, bearing the men, — the

sinews and strength of the community, — content to work hard and uncomplainingly for their daily dollars, and to be the not altogether appreciated slaves of their womankind. Scarcely one of them, perhaps, thinks of the wonder of concentrated human energy they present, or the beauty and pathos of their patience and faithfulness to the race.

The humorous side of the picture lies in the women and the shops. One may see as many women as men downtown in New York any day. They go there from habit, or because there is ever some last one thing necessary to keep them abreast of the fashion. The New York woman of the kind that supports the dry goods stores has no very serious pursuit in life, and she is inclined to be fat and overweening from idleness and too easy living. But as a class she is very pretty, — a creature of clear eyes and a soft wholesome skin and a most endearing self-conceit, — and the New York man worships her and slaves his whole life away that she may be the highly fashionable, indolent, luxurious product she is.

The tumultuous crowds that swept Leone up did not assimilate her. Hers was a personality not easily obliterated, and they stood apart respectfully and eyed her, the women enviously, the men with never failing admiration. But the herds impeded her, and she scorned them; fatigue had not gentled the savage in her, but she was anxious to be at home and rest a little.

So she came there at last. The quietude of the house seemed almost a new luxury at first. It was her own house. Cleworth had deeded it to her for a wedding gift. At that time she had been almost penniless, and, because he had feared lest some evil stroke of the unseen future might leave her again unprovided for, he had taken that way of protecting her. He had not been mercenary then, nor complained that she was extravagant. He had been in love with her, she supposed cynically. Well — it was a matter of small consequence at this date.

Laying aside her furs and wraps she bathed away the soil and weariness of the city, and dressed herself again in lazy con-

tent. So absorbed was she that she had forgotten all external things till a slight movement behind her caused her to wheel round, startled.

Cleworth had come to the doorway and was standing there with whitened face, watching her. His eyes looked large and dark and fearsome, and were ringed about with shadows. As she turned round he whispered only one word, "Leone."

"Well?" she demanded. Furiously she vowed to herself that if this was trouble it should not affect her. She would not bear it.

"Don't speak like that!" he cried in a voice full of entreaty. "Stand by me, little woman, for the Lord's sake! I need you. I've done the very best I could for you. I've fought it out as long as I could, but it's no use. I had to go under to-day."

"Go under — what is that?" she said hastily. She knew the purport of the words too well, but she would not believe it.

"Fail!"

He stopped, dumbly searching her face

for support, but her dead silence threw him back, compelling him to go on. "I failed to-day. I've seen it coming for some time; you know I've warned you. Leone — be kind. I'd have saved you from this if I could, but you have helped to drive me on it."

He came in quickly with his hands outstretched in appeal. True, it was she who had helped to drive him on ruin — that but for her he might have fought himself clear of it; but she was his wife whom duty bound him to love and cherish, and save for that single cry that was wrung from him, he was not seeking to hide himself behind her delinquency.

But she eluded and stood scornfully confronting him. Long as it had threatened, the news had fallen on her at last with the weight of mountains. She felt herself the prey of a furious helplessness. Was this to be the end of her day of mad triumph?

"Stand there — don't touch me!" she flashed in a voice that yet trembled. "Do you mean to tell me you have — actually — failed?"

"I won't touch you, never fear," he answered grimly, then dropped into a chair, and groaning, shut away the sight of her hard eyes with his hand. "Yes — I had to tell you. I had hoped you would n't take it like this. — My God, you ought to have known it was coming; I warned you often enough!"

"Oh, I knew nothing, nothing whatever," she cried. "Yes, you warned me; you were always warning; but nothing ever happened, and how was I to know? What is going to happen to us now? We shall be disgraced and poor, and have to go away from here and live in some horrible, cheap place. Oh, I *cannot* bear it!"

It was a wail of grief and humiliation. That pity for which he had vainly pleaded was forthcoming in plenty now, not for him but for herself.

"Don't," he said comfortingly; "don't cry, Leone, there 's a dear girl. I 'll do something for you. I have n't had time to collect myself yet, but in a day or two I 'll think of something. I 'm young; I 'll begin over

again. You have this house, that 's a blessed comfort, anyway; you can let it out to some one and we 'll go somewhere else for a while. We can't starve, at least while we have the rent."

"Oh, but it 's the disgrace of stepping down in the world. People will talk and smile, and say mean things. They always do," Leone moaned energetically, and he stood silent. This was true, and he had no comfort to offer.

"I will *not* bear it, Irve. You should n't ask me to!" she cried. She flung back her head and looked at him, her golden brown eyes wet with distressed tears but shining with determination. "This is my own house. You remember you gave it to me, and you 've always said it was mine to do as I liked with. I won't rent it; the sum would n't be worth considering. I 'll sell it, and live on the money in my own style for a few years while you 're getting on your feet again."

"I 'm afraid the plan would n't work," said Cleworth innocently, swallowing his anxiety lest she should really try such a plan. "Our

style of living is more expensive than you have any idea of, Leone. If we kept on we should go through everything again in a few years. Besides, I might not be on my feet again even then. We must consider that too, you know."

"Yes, I know," she insisted; "I did think of that. But you don't understand. I 'm very sorry, Irve, I am indeed," — she had the grace to find it difficult to continue, — "of course there would n't be enough for both of us; I did n't mean that. We — we shall have to live separately for the present. You 're a man. You can worry along somehow for a few years while you 're working up again. And it won't be so hard on me. You see it would be best, Irve, don't you?"

Cleworth drew back. It was evident he saw something at last, though possibly not that. He was looking down on her from such a height, the sense of it pierced through even her redoubtable complacency. In his pale, troubled face was the look of a man who has suffered a sudden, unlooked-for blow.

"Do you know what you 're saying, Leone? You don't mean that?" — the whisper was incredulous.

"I do. Why not? Is it so heinous? I have the right to do as I like with my own. You have said it yourself many a time."

"Yes; certainly you have the right!" — such a blaze of indignation and scorn flashed down upon her that involuntarily she backed off a little. "And when the few years are over, and I have worried along somehow as you suggest, and have worked myself up again, — may I presume that then, having exhausted your means, you will come back to me and be my wife?"

"Don't be so unpleasant, Irving," she cried, tossing her head in dissent. "Of course I 'll come back. I 'm a respectable woman, I hope. It 's not that I care for the money in itself, for I 'm not mercenary in the least. Only you can't afford to support me properly as matters are now. I 'd have to give up things I simply can't give up. It 's not fair to ask me."

"Don't," he said; his voice was supernat-

urally low and quiet, but when she tried to meet his eyes the light in them beat hers down again. "Don't trouble to explain; it's not worth your while, really. You think then that I will be turned out of this house by you — my wife to whom I gave it in good faith? Do you think I am so craven as to wait for that? Choose. If you mean to do this thing I will go. We will say good-by now — to-night — and there will be no coming back again for either of us. Understand that. You have the right to do as you will with your own; I don't deny it. Make your choice now."

Evidently he had executed a flank movement with a vengeance, — for she stared at him as if dumfounded, her golden-brown eyes wide, her red lips apart. It was one thing to have wished to leave him of her own free will, but quite another to find herself cast off, undesired.

"Do you mean you 'll go for good? that I can't ever come back to you again if I do it?" she cried in astonishment.

"Certainly I do. What else?"

"Oh, you are a brute — a brute. You are unjust and wicked to tie my hands like that," she burst forth tremblingly; "you are robbing me of my free will."

Cleworth walked slowly but inexorably to the door, while she remained where she was, silent now, a spectacle of avarice that had overreached itself, fighting back enraged tears.

At the threshold he paused and looked back inquiringly: she would relent and save herself at the pinch, he thought, knowing well how she hated all idea of scandal.

But she raised her hand and fairly weeping with defiant passion and mortification pointed him away. What her words meant was not altogether clear to him. She cried:

"Go if you wish — I have made my choice. After all I 'm a prisoner of circumstances, it seems, and you are the jailer. But I will not be coerced by you, or by any one. Go!"

CHAPTER XV

A TRIUMPH OF RESPECTABILITY

For Mr. Paul Elsner two weeks passed heavily away. He had heard absolutely nothing more of Leone. He was not a man whom the social round of teas and musicales and "At Homes" greatly interested, — finding the harsher sports of the men much more entertaining, — but during the two weeks past he had gone everywhere assiduously in the hope of meeting her again. To be in love with a woman and yet be forbidden her house, especially by her husband, is a trying predicament for a lover and would have cured many men. It had not cured Elsner, however. But with all his efforts he had not seen Leone anywhere, nor had he heard any news of her. It was as though the city had swallowed her up.

He could not rest so. He lunched regu-

instantaneously resolved itself into a state of blockade.

Elsner resigned himself to wait. He preferred Broadway, else he might have cut through a side street to the westward and taken a train uptown. There was a deplorable lack of reason for his going there as matters stood however, so he remained. And presently an enterprising newsboy pressed his way through the jam, and Elsner bought a paper of him. And from the paper he learned his first news of Leone.

The paragraph was brief, and stated, with a hint of mystery between the lines, that a lady well known on the west side, the wife of Mr. Irving Cleworth, a broker who had recently come to grief in the Street, was disposing of her house. Rumor said that Mr. Cleworth had not been seen at his home for the last fortnight, and that trouble of a serious nature between the husband and wife was the cause of the step, rather than financial reasons. At all events, the house belonged to Mrs. Cleworth, who was acting alone and independently of her husband.

At the house it had been stated that Mr. Cleworth had gone away for a few days on business; but as a matter of fact he was known to be living in another quarter of the city, engaged in winding up his affairs.

Elsner read, and for a brief moment or two gazed across the street. The flash of red flame and the smoke that burst from an upper window, driving the glass crashing to the street and on the broad helmets of the firemen, were but a cloud upon his retina, through which his brain was looking on another scene: Leone, wrapped in the golden mists of desire, passionately scorning him, telling him, "I have never longed in vain for things I could not have. Whatever I need of the world I will take for myself." Was this the tale of her fight or of her defeat? She had not sent him a single word concerning herself. If that was an omen, how was he to read it?

He would see. Casting away the paper and pressing through the crowd, he struck decisively westward for the elevated railroad.

Like many another wise and respected

saying, the assertion that "all the world loves a lover" is only true within limits. The world does not love the lover who is in love with another man's wife, and yet, considered strictly as a lover, he has his claims to sympathy, merely on the ground that he receives so little of it. Presumably he shares the very same doubts and bleak despondencies, the trembling hopes that are the lot of other lovers; and very likely even the lady herself sometimes takes advantage of his position to trample upon his tenderest feelings in the name of propriety. And yet the world will have none of him. He is an Ishmael, whose hand is uplifted against the primeval social instinct, which even the savage respects. There is no doubt whatever that even the wolf has his anxieties, and is at times very unhappy, but no one ever seems to think it necessary to express any sympathy for him.

Accordingly, Elsner was the victim of emotions in themselves dear and human enough, but in him only hateful. He did not know how Leone would meet him. He

strongly doubted his hold on her, for he gauged her that up to now she had loved nothing in heaven or earth except herself. And it might be that her impeccable respectability would fling him back in wrath for his pains. Still, because he knew her, he went, as a strong wild animal who recognizes his mate goes to her, full of determination and desire, held in check only by his dread of her.

He did not feel himself the dishonorable vagabond he was when he rang the bell and was ushered into the house. He was far beyond that. He sent up his name audaciously, as though daring her to refuse him an audience. Then he waited triumphantly in the semi-darkness of drawn blinds and shaded windows. He knew one palpitating, all dominating sensation — an ardent prescience that this was the hour at last in which he would conquer her.

Presently he heard on the stairs the faint, whispering rustle of a dress. It set loose a hammer in his head — whose strokes kept time to the loud rhythmic pulsations of his

heart, laboring fiercely beneath his cold, composed exterior. No maid's dress ever made that sound. She was coming herself. His will had forced her to come.

She was in the room, and he was bowing to her.

"You have come," he said. A world of mastery vibrated in the words, and her hand which she had given him she withdrew coldly, and her whole being flashed forth conflict at him. The obscurity invested her with a rare prohibitive charm. Her unhesitating animosity spurred him on, and made the conquest of her only a more irresistible seduction. Even his auditory nerves throbbed at the indomitable antagonism to himself in her clear, precise voice.

"Yes, I have come. Why not? I have come to tell you again that you were wrong. You offered me your pity because you thought you saw me vainly striving against circumstances. And I told you that to me circumstances were myths. You said I was helpless; you remember that?"

"Yes. Tell me about it," he said.

Leone was as conscious of his domination over her as the bird is of storm before it breaks. She was striving against it. She wanted no love of his! But she had laid her plans carefully — for Cleworth was useless now in every case, and she would need money by and by — and she was going to utilize this brash lover to that end in a perfectly respectable, dispassionate way. But he should serve her merely; he should *not* be master. Let him hear her tale and judge whether her will matched his. So she told it him, flinging it at him with the burning wish to see him confuted, and feeling no shame whatever in it.

If she had known how little he heard! Watching her eyes absorbing the light and glowing and dilating in their very arrogance of life, he was thinking: "No man has ever tamed them. No man but me! I am going to tame them now."

He caught the gist of the recital, however. She expected adulation perhaps, or at least, to glory over him; but when she had finished he laughed.

"You actually told him to his face that until he had funds again he was undesirable? Rather harsh treatment even for a husband. He would have been a fool to stay."

She haughtily demanded, "How dare you express yourself like that? I did not ask your opinion; I merely wished you to know the facts. Will you say I had no right to do as I wished with my own? I made him a reasonable proposal, and he deserted me. Will you say he was right to desert me?"

"Pardon — yes. He was right — if it had been any other woman in the world but you. I would have stayed and conquered you. 'Leone — Leone!" he flung all feint of sarcasm and reserve to the winds and advanced eagerly: "Leone, let him go. Come to me instead. I love you. Listen, I will give you all the things he cannot give you. You 'll take them from me now, Leone?" And he sought to put his arms round her.

"Stand there, Mr. Elsner," she said in a voice as clear and imperturbable as a Puritan maiden's.

Her coldness struck him all at once with such a blight that he stopped short, abashed.

And still, though the chilly voice unmistakably warned him, it seemed to him that she was smiling. He stared at her in perplexity. Was she inviting him? He could not tell. No, she must rather be mocking him.

"You forget, Mr. Elsner. Please don't make a mistake. I am Mrs. Irving Cleworth. I have been cruelly deserted by my husband, and I must do the best I can for myself, but remember I will do nothing that society does not sanction," — without a doubt she was smiling now; "what is it you would ask of me, Mr. Elsner?" she inquired.

A moment longer he stood in uncertainty and deadly earnest. His cynicism had fled. Then her meaning flashed upon him.

"Marry me, if you will," he cried. "Shake Cleworth off. What is he to you now? He deserted you — rightly or wrongly — and the law will free you from him if you wish. You have nothing to hope from him. Madam," he said formally, "if you will divorce that man I have the honor to ask you

to be my wife." Then he put out his hand to take her again. But she still eluded him, smiling mockingly.

"Well — perhaps. But I don't love you, Mr. Elsner, remember that. Even as your wife I won't love you. And call me Mrs. Cleworth, if you please, until then. I am not Leone to you yet."

"You are Leone!" he said with smothered triumph, "Leone, Leone, — and you love me!"

"I hate you!" she said rapidly; the words would not come as fast as she wanted to say them. "I hate you, I have hated you all my life — all of it, before I knew you, I think. I wish I had ten lives — a thousand; I would hate you in every one of them, and fight you!"

"And *love* me," he laughed thickly. "You little devil, you love me and don't know it. Do you not love me? Ah — learn then if you do not." His arms possessed her with the grasp of a whirlwind, and he stopped her mouth with his kisses.

Her strength opposed to his was that of

a straw. He was the stronger, after all. But she struggled fiercely. Hate of him, resistance to his will, hate of his lips that were overpowering hers rose to an ecstasy — an exhilarating passion, a rapidly filling cup whose waters, if once they could accomplish an overflow, would in the very act turn to love. In the last utter abandon of hostility to him, in the climax of her rage, she felt them overflow. Her lips moved against his passionately; she was returning his kisses.

He ceased, and looking on her with hot eyes, questioned her. "Answer me, it is true — is it not? You love me?" But for answer she lay quite still, supine, with face suffused and upturned, with her immaculate respectability — brought at last to the only test it could understand — falling about her in rags, and with eyes half-closed, shining, consenting, — in his arms.

He had conquered her apparently. Yet, if he had but known it, she had in her very surrender snatched the victory. At the worst he was but a scamp; and she had utilized him, and would reform him after a

while and make him as decorous and respectable a member of society as she was herself. Her plans had all worked out beautifully, just as she had intended, with the exception of that surprising little tableau at the end, which hardly mattered now, since the world would never know of it. She had provided for herself an excellent competence; and meantime she would be the respectable Mrs. Cleworth still, who *later*, after her divorce, would announce her coming marriage. All the world was welcome to hear the story of her base and pitiless desertion by the man whose incompetence had brought her almost to ruin; and society would wish her well, and would see no dishonor in her second marriage; and the kindly and majestic arm of the law would make the way thereto easy, and would lend dignity and justice to this opportune surrender to her supreme, enduring, and all-compelling passion — of love? Well, perhaps so. Call it love — of money.

CHAPTER XVI

A LITTLE BRONZE WEAPON

To Belle, looking back long afterwards upon that time, it seemed that the days rose and set one after another in a pearly gray mist. Nothing of them remained very clear except the pain. Of the small circle that had been as well the storm centre of interest as the horizon to which her dark love-quickened eyes had looked with foreboding, not one was left but Clara. Leone had sold her house and was gone; Belle had not inquired where, but the gossip of their acquaintances which reached her said to the West. Elsner had apparently vanished off the face of the earth. He had not left even a note or a message for his fiancée; and Belle — whose heart was growing soft and big, and to whom life was teaching its great solemn harmonies of sweet and bitter

— Belle did not grieve when Clara came back to health with no remembrance of her trouble. The girl was usually very gentle and pensive, but there were moments of strange violent gusts of passion without adequate cause. At times it seemed as if she was trying hard to recall some elusive memory, some faint familiar image that rose up and cast its passing shadow on the surface of her mind. But the image itself lay safely locked away in those brain cells that had been injured by the fall; and as the days passed there was cause to fear that other faculties besides the one of memory had been permanently impaired.

And Cleworth too was gone. His going had been to Belle both a pain and a delight. A pain, because beyond that momentary hard handclasp and the scarcely uttered "good-by" there had lain no comforting hope of a reunion. Ah, the burden of unsaid words that lay between them — words that must forever remain unsaid — had they been more of barrier, or of bond, Belle afterwards wondered? The pain of

them had freed the eyes of both from the embarrassment that belongs to little occasions, but vibrated near to the breaking point in Belle's low voice as she gave her hand to Cleworth and said, "Good-by, Irve." And Cleworth, answering as an honest man might, in spite of the pause that crept between the words, had only said very softly, "Good-by, Belle — dear." It was his upright simple creed that a man should always try to be as decent a fellow as he could, whatever the circumstances.

He had been very indefinite about his plans; purposely so, Belle divined. They did not even know whether he was to remain in New York. But he had promised to communicate with them every little while, twice a year perhaps, that they might know he was well, and that he might be sure no trouble of any sort had befallen them. Then he had gone, carrying with him the touch of Belle's soft, warm fingers in his hand.

She knew the reason he went. It was in that that the delight lay; and in her solitude she liked to take the reason out of her heart,

and look at it, and give herself up to that pure holy happiness which draws all the sting from the heart and bids it overflow from the eyes. He had placed her on a pedestal so high. It was because he loved her he went; because loving her he had been afraid to stay near her lest some day he should sully love and her by words he had no right to say, or she to hear. Dear God bless him — and if there was sin in a love whose honor was so white, be hers the blame for both, since she was as guilty as he. So prayed the pure heart of a child, the passion of a loving woman; and then Belle would go forth again with her heart attuned to the throbbing of all the love and loyalty and sorrow in the big dear heart of the world.

Late in January Clara was sufficiently recovered to return home. Back once more among old familiar surroundings her mind might regain its poise, the doctors hoped, and memory knit up its dropped links again. So Belle had acquiesced and waited, wondering a little whether forgetfulness was not

sometimes a happier lot, for Clara and for others, than this remembrance that was so ardently desired.

To be gentle to the thing that is weaker and sadder than itself is the refuge of a strong heart crying for its own love. Cleworth was lost to her; but it might be that by lightening a little of the universal pain she could lighten his. So in a passion of self-effacement Belle went to Clara. Here was something weak enough, a fellow-victim helping to pay the price of the happiness Leone had taken for herself.

There were intimations, however, that even Clara might yet be a factor in the final adjustments of events.

"Belle," she said one day, in the halting manner of an invalid, "did you ever hear that story about Bruce and the spider?"

Belle nodded.

"How he kept on climbing and climbing and falling back again, and in spite of all his efforts never getting to the top! He did get to the top at last, though, did n't he?"

"Of course he did. Why, Clara?" said Belle pitifully.

"Because I am like that spider. There is something I am always trying, trying to remember. It seems to lie there always in my mind, but underneath something else, just out of sight. I try so hard that I get tired and forget that I am trying, but next day when I am rested I begin again harder than ever. Belle, you really think I shall succeed some day, don't you?"

"Some day, perhaps, if you wish it so much, Clara. But you must not try so hard, or that will prevent you from ever remembering," said Belle very gently. She wondered thankfully that the invalid never asked questions, but to Clara the elusive something of which she was in search was a thing in her own brain. She must find it herself. No one else could help her.

To distract her from the idea Belle struck out at random.

"I 'm going shopping to-morrow, Clara. If I don't I believe I 'll forget how. And you 're coming with me — you 're quite

strong enough; and we 'll spend a lot of money: goodness knows we need things; and we 'll lunch at Pelton's " — She stopped suddenly and bit her lip.

" Pelton's ! " exclaimed Clara curiously. " Where 's that ? I don't know it."

" Oh, don't you ? It 's a place on Broadway. Never mind. I thought you knew it, perhaps," Belle prevaricated. " Should n't you like to see the stores again, Clara, after all this time ? "

" Oh, yes; and we 'll take a hansom, Bella — I love hansoms," assented the invalid delightedly. Not to love hansoms is to be stronger-minded than either of these two.

So the next day they went shopping together.

At a certain costly and exclusive place on Broadway they stopped, and Belle said : —

" I must go in here for a minute, Clara. Come along in and see the pretty Japanese things. I am going to buy poppa a present — it 's his birthday to-morrow. Mine 's next week, you see; and he 's always so liberal

that it makes me feel perfectly despicable when I happen to forget his."

Clara laughed and docilely alighted, and they went into the shop together.

It took some time to find an article that might be considered useful and appropriate for Mr. Thompson Werner's birthday. The choice sifted down at last to a fat bronze toad with a detachable headpiece, who sat on his hind legs and offered no protest whatever at finding himself converted into an inkstand, and an old, queer-looking Japanese dagger, also of musty bronze, to be utilized as a paper knife.

"He has too many inkstands already; I saw three when I was at your house," Clara objected. "Give him the paper knife. It 's a lovely old curio, and gentlemen have a taste for old weapons."

"It 's next to impossible to give them anything they really want," Belle mourned. "With a woman there are five thousand things you can choose from. I don't like daggers. This one looks so ancient and musty." She raised the old weapon in her

live, modern, handsomely gloved fingers and distastefully examined it. " Ugh — it 's a little too suggestive of blood and murder and sudden death. They 'd have buried it with the old Jap miscreant that owned it if I had been there."

" Oh, Bella, but you ought to like the association of mystery — that 's the charm of it. You 're too modern. I love those funny old things. And it 's only the handle that 's musty, anyway."

" Well, give me something modern," said Belle. " Poppa can buy himself old daggers if he wants them."

Clara looked wistfully at the treasure. " I 'd buy it myself if I could afford the money."

" Would you? Do you truly like it as much as that? I 'll lend you some money, then."

Clara hesitated, but finally shook her head resignedly. " No, thanks; it 's most kind of you, but I could n't let you. It would be too long before I could pay you back, Bella."

"Oh, nonsense; hush!" Belle whispered. "I'll tell you how we'll arrange it. You make me some lace, Clara, and we'll call it a fair exchange. I'll have to buy some soon if you don't, and I'd prefer yours to any. You know, since your illness, you do somehow make the most exquisite patterns I've ever seen."

This was quite true. Clara's faint blush of pleasure acknowledged it; and the final outcome was that Belle bought the inkstand to be a birthday gift for Mr. Thompson Werner, and Clara bought her admired curio. Then they left the shop and proceeded on their way.

Very soon, however, the interminable roar and rattle of familiar Broadway began to stimulate into new energy Clara's effort at remembrance. Her blue eyes grew introspective, and the ceaseless futile research of her mind into itself appeared upon her face in a dejected, tired expression. Belle, noting, decided privately that it was time to go home again.

"I'm going in here for just a minute,

Clara, and then we 'll go home. No — don't you bother to come with me; you 're too tired. Wait here; I won't be longer than a minute."

Belle disappeared into the shop. She was not in reality more than a minute. But even in that short interval strange things may happen in the metropolis. When she emerged a portentous change had passed over Clara. The girl was standing up in the cab, her face working with excitement as she gazed eagerly at the opposite side of the street. Like a lightning flash a storm of passion passed over and disfigured her features; then suddenly, even while Belle looked, she precipitated herself from the cab and was madly dashing across Broadway.

Spellbound with alarm Belle gazed helplessly after her. It was at one of those points where Broadway is really broad, and where the hardened city man glances watchfully from side to side while he essays the crossing. Suddenly, far across on the opposite shore of that river of traffic, Belle beheld a woman who was leisurely awaiting an ap-

proaching car, and whose every indolent graceful turn of carriage was familiar even at that distance. It was Leone — dropped from the clouds apparently, as people have a knack of being in New York, and serenely unconscious of the poor crazed Nemesis following on her track.

Fortunately the car came up while a procession of other vehicles hid her for a moment from Clara's sight. With a breath of relief Belle saw that she stepped up into it and was carried away just a second or two before Clara, rescuing herself with wonderful agility from the chaos of wheels and horses' feet, arrived unerringly on the spot. But now no Leone was there. Clara looked round stupidly. The effect on her was the same as a man feels when he strikes out with all his strength at some object which eludes him and leaves him baffled and disjointed. Memory had been but a breath upon the mirror. Her mind slipped back instantly into its old forgetfulness; she could not even remember why she had wanted so greatly to cross the street; and when Belle came

to her at last she clung to her, crying passionately and helplessly: —

"I remembered; oh, Belle, I remembered for a minute. All of a sudden I saw something that reminded me — but I don't know what it was, and now I 've forgotten again. Take me back; I did n't mean to run away, — but just as soon as you went I saw it, and I could n't wait. Oh, Bella — what shall I do?" Crying and lamenting, her strength spent by her passion, she went contritely back to the hansom, and they drove home.

But the box containing the little dagger had lain harmlessly on the seat all through the episode. Poor Clara's ideas of vengeance were very nebulous; and yet Belle wondered a little what might actually have happened if the treacherous memory had continued to serve for a fraction of a minute longer.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROMOTER

BROADWAY lay discouraged and deserted, for a summer drizzle of rain had been falling all afternoon and evening until late at night. Now it was abating, and the wicked shiny little puddles that lay in the gutters were already blinking their eyes at the lamps in an unregenerate manner, as though they were bidding them hope for the good times that would come to-morrow when all this cleansing should be over.

But whatever its morals or its moods the New Yorker always loves Broadway; and it was this fascination, rather than any notion of business, of which he had all too little in these days, that drew Cleworth thither on this rainy night. And incidentally, he was on his way to get something to eat.

He was not a pessimist ordinarily, but

to-night he felt even more depressed than the weather. In his palmier days he had been a charitable, kind-hearted fellow, who when some cry from the sad, seamy side of life had reached him, had been wont to put his hands in his pockets with a kindly air and say "Poor things," and respond liberally. But it was — ah, so different an experience now, when his own eyes looked upward at life from that same seamy side of the canopy.

For one thing it was so much more extensive than he had ever dreamed of. So many people lived there — three quarters of the world, he discovered; whose gray days were filled with strivings that never seemed to attain any end more profitable than their own weariness, and with thwarted ambitions that died for the lack of a fostering, kindly prosperity. The terrible earnestness with which the most part took their lives seemed to him a tragedy because it was so inevitably futile. But one day after many disappointments it occurred to him that his own earnestness was perhaps quite as tragic, and

quite as much of a futility. For this after all was the mediocre dead level at which lived the real world. Those whom some favoring accident of circumstances, or a rare ability, had raised above it did not at all constitute the world, as they fondly imagined — or even the major part of it. They were only its casual and impersonal and blessed exceptions.

And among them was Belle, the loveliest and most desirable, yet eternally cut off from him. She was a stranger, as he loved to think, to the shifts and hankerings of this lower plane. She was further from him now than the stars, and that was well; for with his poverty to emphasize it there was no fear of his forgetting the gulf that divided them. Had he been wiser in those other days when there was no gulf, then perhaps it might have been that — But he knew the folly and danger of that line of speculation and did not encourage it.

Cleworth found nothing on Broadway to-night to refute his murky philosophy. Only the very rag, tag, and bobtail of even

life's seamy side, with here and there a reduced, haggard-eyed gentleman-ranker like himself, silently chewing the bitter cud of reflection! The rain grew less and less, and the all-night restaurants began to look hopeful and brisk, even though the attenuated theatre crowds had already melted toward the regions uptown. To one of these houses, a place where one could get a good meal and cheap, Cleworth was leisurely bound. He was considering cheapness in these days with a persistence that would have drawn down anathemas from Leone.

A touch of most novel and welcome friendliness upon his shoulder detained him as he was on the point of entering. Turning, he recognized in the intruder a man whom he had long known, and heretofore rather gratuitously disliked; but such ill company had his thoughts been that the welcome was only a very little diminished for that. Prosperity and a certain ineffable suggestion of good intent, and still more, of opportuneness in this meeting radiated from the stranger, and had its instant effect upon poor

scheme. He had the great ease of manner which is a part of the stock in trade of every successful promoter, and is the assurance to the world of his own impeccable sincerity, as well as of the unprecedented feasibleness and desirability of his ideas. He was also a man of considerable tact when business issues were at stake, and his scheme was literally unfolded to Cleworth. It concerned a mine in the Black Hills country, of which Cleworth had recently heard some talk, for it was at a time when interest in the dormant Western mining lands was being revived in New York.

The extraordinary name of Dutton's mine was the Tin Bucket.

"The name's a mascot," explained Dutton. "We called it that because we had to buy out a couple of poor crazy old chaps who had staked a claim there and used to carry up the ore in an old tin bucket. They had never made a cent, of course, because they could n't raise enough ore that way to pay for the expense of milling, but they thought they had. They had a notion that

every lump of ore they raised was pure gold, and they used to take strangers out to see their ore dump, and brag about the fortunes they had made out of it. And the funny thing about it was that they finally sold out to us for a very moderate sum. Plumb crazy, you see, poor old things.

"But I'd just like to tell you a few facts about that mine, Cleworth. I'm enthusiastic about it because I've been out there for the last ten weeks looking over the ground myself, so I know everything is just as it's stated. We've got a magnificent piece of property there, I tell you. We own the whole of one of those hills, and part of the one next to it — about a square mile of as fine a mining region as you could possibly find; for the Company was the first to come on the ground, and it staked its claims so as to get just what it wanted. You see — this is between ourselves for the present — we have a good notion that the main lode of the Golden Fleece mine, the one the Jason Brothers are making their fortunes out of, ought to run right through our property.

If it does, why" — Dutton paused and smiled expressively, — "if it does you might as well say we own the United States Mint, Cleworth. But even if it does n't — allowing that 's a miscalculation — we 're all right in any case. It 's a property that can't be beaten. We have had the expert for the Golden Fleece people over to pass judgment on it, and he says it is A No. 1. It 's all right! As good a property, by the looks of it, as the Jasons'. I have his report in my rooms; I brought it East with me, and I 'll let you look at it to-morrow — and the government surveyor's report too. He says just the same as Jasons' man. You see I want you, Cleworth, before you touch your hand to this thing, to understand that it 's no fake. There 's no sham about it. We don't need that sort of thing. We 're going to make all the money we want without it."

"That 's good. And about how much would that be?" asked Cleworth smiling. Dutton's energy and belief in his scheme were very pleasantly convincing, and the

prospect of connection with so promising an enterprise was reassuring to the man whose entire capital at the moment was in his trousers pockets. Dutton had paused while he produced a handsome little folio of views of the property. He laughed confidently at Cleworth's question.

"How much? Well, I can't say, of course, what the ultimate figures will be. No man can; and if I were to make a guess at it you would n't believe me. I prefer to be moderate. But judging by the present output, which should get richer as we work further in, we calculate we 'll have some three or four million dollars apiece in five years from now."

Cleworth smiled unbelievingly.

"You fellows with mines," said he, "are all millionaires in embryo. The trouble with you is that you so seldom come to birth — is n't it?" But Dutton waved his fingers deprecatingly while he chatted on unabashed:

"I said you would n't believe me, you know. You mark those words of mine,

though, and remember them, and when the time comes see whether I 've overstated the facts. Now look here at these views. This will give you some idea of what we 're doing, and of whether we believe in our own property or not. Look at that machinery now."

Cleworth turned the pages thoughtfully, Dutton enthusiastically interpreting. Mountain landscapes, where snow mottled the earth between vanishing dreary reaches of scrub pine; a sterile valley which commercial looking heaps of rock and rubble, sluices, tanks, and great stretches of cabalistic piping rendered unsightly; machinery in various processes of operation, and a number of buildings clustered about a large one which was a Stamp Mill, — the ugliness and barrenness of everything were the chief credentials of its value. Cleworth read prosperity in the ruthless utility of every bald chimney and snow-speckled plank and pipe.

He thought deeply while he looked.

All of this was of course Dutton's parley. The momentous question of the night would

be reached in another minute. Every tick of the clock made it larger and more absorbing to him. What did this wealthy enterprise, that bought a mountain for its unit of operations as other men buy a corner lot, want with Irving Cleworth, bankrupt and glaringly "on his uppers"? That he would discover now.

He passed the book back to Dutton. Then he lit one of Dutton's proffered cigars, and turning comfortably sidewise in his chair, crooked his arm upon the back and assumed the airs of a man with favors to give.

"This seems all very fine, Dutton. Very fine, indeed. I 'm glad you showed it to me, ah — well?"

"Well, sir? I 'm glad you like it, — thought you would!" said Dutton non-committally. And then there was a pause.

Cleworth broke it with: "Yes; like it very much so far as I see. But of course it is n't anything to me, Dutton. You understand that?"

"M—m," said Dutton thoughtfully with

closed lips. He removed his cigar and flicked the ash into the tray softly and with studious care while he remarked impressively: "There 's only just one thing we want out there, Cleworth, that we have n't got. That 's *money!*"

"You 'll have it in five years from now — millions," was the dry retort.

They smoked for half a minute in dead silence, each steadfastly regarding the other, till Dutton delivered himself confidentially, "We want it now, Cleworth."

"Most natural, I 'm sure," said our penniless but agreeable financier, — "so do I." Then they smiled understandingly on each other with their eyes, and Dutton launched forth.

"Well, you see, Cleworth, it 's like this. We 've got the place, and it 's all that we claim it to be, but as a matter of fact we 've sunk all our money in the plant and the machinery, trusting to the public to come in and buy stock to enable us to operate. The public, however, does n't seem to want stock — it has been bitten that way so often,

I suppose — and so, you see, there we are. We 've got to raise the money somehow, but so far we have n't succeeded. Now I want to know if you 'll help us."

"I? There are a thousand men in New York with money and credit who could find backers for you better than I could. Just now I 'm down and out. Why have you come to me?"

"I presumed you would ask that. Well, if you want the truth, here it is. We 're not looking for backers. We don't propose to mortgage ourselves and the Tin Bucket to anybody. We are going to keep the power right in our own hands. All we want is the people, the ordinary well-to-do crowd that has the money, to buy our stock. Consequently we have to find a man who has a large acquaintance with them, a man whose reputation for square dealing will give his word weight, to tell them that the scheme is all right. For this reason we have come to you."

Dutton delivered himself of this tribute with his most especial frankness, but Cle-

worth only stared at him in silence. Modesty is like vanity in this, that she is sensitive about seeing our own private characteristics dangled before our eyes in the hand of a stranger. Dislike of Dutton and his schemes rose again in Cleworth's mind. This straightforward, simple appeal had points about which he would like to think a little.

"I could do it for you," he said slowly, "but of course I 'll have to be satisfied first. I won't touch it otherwise. What 's the matter, Dutton," — he smiled slightly, — "you 're a New Yorker yourself, are n't you? What 's the matter with your own reputation that it won't cover the case? Why in the dickens should I stake my reputation on your old Tin Bucket?"

"Don't take offense. Simply because you know the people we want and I don't, and they 'll listen to you where they won't listen to us. Also because we 'll make it worth your while. We 'll give you ten thousand shares of stock down — it will be valuable enough presently — and we 'll pay

you any reasonable commission you ask on the amount of every investment you bring to us. That is a proposal worthy the consideration of any man."

"That is entirely as it may be," said Cleworth cautiously. "I 'm inclined to be chary, Dutton, about what you 're pleased to call my reputation for square dealing. I 'm greatly obliged to you; and of course I understand that everything is just as you say it is; but I won't do anything in it until after I 've seen those reports and had time to think matters over."

They separated at the door with mutual good will. It was past midnight and the rain had ceased. Cleworth walked back to his dingy lodging, revolving Dutton's talk in his head. It was the finest offer he had had yet, and he might be a great fool if he refused it. He only hoped it was genuine — he hoped with all the accumulated earnestness of these weary six months of effort and disappointment, that the business would prove to be genuine.

CHAPTER XVIII

BESIDE THE HUDSON

In the morning it occurred to Cleworth that he needed advice. It would be immensely satisfying to know what dear old Thompson Werner thought of the proposition, and also — he did not consciously add — what Belle thought of it. The idea took its rise in his hunger for sight and sound of her. For over half a year he had not seen her or communicated with her, holding doggedly to his conviction that it was best. He would not have her subjected to the gossip that his presence near her would inevitably bring. Neither, since he was mortgaged to another woman, would he seem to offer this one what honor and dear love of her forbade. To be near her was to run the risk of folly; therefore he kept away. It was his simple solution of how a man may be loyal to two masters.

But it was more than six months, and surely he was to be pardoned if he allowed himself one glimpse. Why not, indeed? Such an unsuccessful beggared wretch as he had become, it was impertinence to suppose any reason why he should not humbly look upon her if he wished. He would go up and see them both to-night, and learn all the news he could of them. He was greedy for news of Belle. She might even be going to marry some fellow soon, he told himself with a tingling sense of helplessness; but in the bottom of his heart he did not believe it for a moment.

Grass never found time to grow under the feet of any enterprise fathered by Dutton, and early in the day he had come with his reports, and stood by to lighten Cleworth's understanding of them by his own very luminous remarks. The staid unimaginative language of the documents amply corroborated his claims, and carried a comfortable potency of conviction to Cleworth's mind. The latter wanted to believe, for these things meant rehabilitation to him.

But the idea of seeing Belle again, once he allowed it to enter, possessed him and utterly tyrannized over him. About noon he remembered that they might not be at home that evening, and the possibility of it so worried him that he dispatched a special messenger to acquaint them with his intention. He believed that Belle would not go out if she knew he was coming; but this belief was in no way incompatible with his low opinion of himself, for abject humility and a very aggravated sort of self-conceit are not at all antipodean qualities in a man who is in love.

The afternoon seemed like an eternity. He began to wonder if there were many changes uptown. Why not go up there for the afternoon and renew acquaintance with the old places? He knew a number of nice quiet haunts where he could dine when the time came, and finally he decided to quit the lower city and go.

There are places in New York where summer is hideous with glare and dust and the noisomeness of crowds, and where the

hot personality of the city overlays one till there is no escaping. But there are other spots where trees which knew New York as a wilderness still grow, and where summer leaves whisper lazily against the blue sky, and the grass waves as the wind passes over it, and the salt breath of tidewater comes on the ripples of the Hudson. Cleworth found a place where the blue river spread itself into a far-off vista between the silvered trunks of two birches whose leaves shut off the sunlight and hung above the water as a canopy. The sounds about him merged indefinitely into silence — the songs of the birds, the leap and rustle and chatter of the squirrels, quiet wandering footsteps passing him by, and the voices of children heard fitfully at a little distance. He was narcotized by degrees into forgetfulness that life held anything but this — this and Belle, whom he had not seen for so long, and of whom he must not even think too long or too deeply. And lo, presently — like a dream face appearing between the stems of the birches — Belle her-

he took a guilty delight in it. "Why, Irve," she reproved him, "for a truly delicate compliment that would be hard to equal. Where 's the use of my objecting when you leap first and look afterwards?"

"Well, it may n't be delicate perhaps, but it 's true," he maintained stoutly. He had relieved her of her parasol and was poking through the roots of the grass with it, in blissful content with the situation and her and himself. In this happy levity was safety for them both. Moved by the same impulse they avoided fearfully the earnest talk that leads nearer to the heart's avenues. And yet they would find themselves unexpectedly upon the byways thereto.

"This seat of yours is a place to dream in," he said. "I had a restless fever this morning, and I came down here and fell to dreaming; and behold, you appeared just there and my dream became visible."

He did not look at her. The sentence had shaped itself in a way he had not quite intended. It was Belle who helped them both off the treacherous ground.

"Yes, it 's a pleasant place. I come often. I did n't know you ever found your way down here, Irve."

"I don't. I never was here before. But the city is so loud and so hot, I grew sick of it all of a sudden. I think it was because I was coming up here to-night. I am a loafer with nothing to do, and I must simply have gravitated down here ahead of time."

He was so painstaking in his explanation this time that what he wished to avoid saying was no less clear — that it was the fever to be in her vicinity that had compelled him. She loved him for his excuses and his unsuccessful honesty in making them, and, turning tender dark eyes upon the neutral river, helped him out once more, this time with the faintest touch of drollery, —

"You 've just come in fine time for dinner."

Swiftly he scanned her face. He almost suspected a jest somewhere at his expense, but though a woman will sometimes laugh for sheer utter love of her beloved, yet if she is discreet he will never discover that she is

laughing. Belle's face was sweet in its gravity, and Cleworth's masculine sensibilities were lulled.

"No, I 'm not coming to dinner. I 'm going to dine at Cosmo's, and come round to your house afterwards."

"Cosmo's?" she objected, "don't! Poppa and I will give you a better dinner than you 'll get at Cosmo's. Come and give us a trial."

"Belle, don't talk such rubbish," he interrupted sternly. "As if what I ate mattered. I shan't notice it, I assure you." But Belle only laughed delightfully.

"Of course not. You will if you eat it at Cosmo's, however; but, Irve, you 're coming to us."

"Well," he demurred assentingly, and then changed and laughed with her because he had needed so little urging to be persuaded.

So in that green, happy place, with the trembling leaves for canopy, and drawn aside from the great world which crooned sonorously and distantly without, they re-

cited to each other all that had come to them in the six months. Not a word was said by either that the world might not have heard, and yet to each of them every moment was a keepsake, to be remembered and looked at dearly during the long night of absence that was coming.

Presently Cleworth received something of a shock.

Belle's eyes were on the far-off haze that overhung the upper reaches of the river. The sun was slanting across the ridge on the opposite shore, and the wooded slopes that arose from the water's edge were robing themselves in dim, nightly blue. Belle had fallen for a few minutes into a muse.

"Irve," she said solemnly, "I 'm glad you 'll see poppa. I want you to talk to him. I think he 'll mind you, perhaps. You know he 's gone perfectly crazy lately — about mines."

She must have felt Cleworth's start, for she looked at him suddenly. But she only saw that a peculiar expression had passed over his face.

"About mines?" said he. "No, I did n't know. How crazy, Bella?"

"Wants to invest. He 's caught the fever. Somebody 's been talking to him, and now he wants to put all his money into mines. I've done my best to cure him of it and talk sense into him, but you know how people are, once they get that complaint. Nothing cures them except to lose a little money."

"Yes," Cleworth admitted guiltily, "I saw a case of it yesterday."

Then with some misgivings he unfolded the great scheme to her. He had wanted her good opinion, because he had felt superstitiously that it would be an omen, but there was little chance of that now. When he mentioned the romantic name of the venture she shook her head so decidedly that his heart sank.

"It 's rather sensational," she objected, "'Tin Bucket'!"

He explained hurriedly that the name was regarded as a mascot.

"Oh, it 's like the names one reads things

about in the newspapers. Something is almost bound to happen with a name like that. I don't like mines; and I shall always be afraid you 'll wake up some morning to find your bucket has a hole in it. And to think, Irve, that you 're down with that fever too! I shall end by catching it myself, probably," she cried in concern.

Cleworth laughed outright. Belle's opinions on mines were so evidently the outcome of the frankest bias.

" I 'm sorry," he prevaricated. " I was going to ask your father's advice to-night."

" You won't have to, Irve. You 'll get it whether you want it or not. The amount of gratuitous information poppa will give you about mines in a minute will frighten you." And then they laughed together; but Cleworth felt a little faint hearted when he thought of his omen.

Presently the sun had dropped beyond the heights and the river. Above the quiet land and the saddened water lingered only the roseate, peaceful hues of memory, and Belle arose with a start of remembrance and

solemnly adjured him: "Irve, we 've kept poppa waiting for his dinner, and he 's a perfect tyrant about it. It 's the only fault he has. You see you 're bound in honor now to come and help me explain."

Laughing, that waif of love arose and followed her.

Mr. Thompson Werner was waiting for his dinner, and varying that occupation by looking for Belle, when he grew suddenly cognizant that that lady with an escort was crossing the road directly in his line of vision. Short scrutiny told him who the escort was, and it was at the door that his welcome met the prodigal.

"Come in!" he cried; "knew you in a minute across the street, Irve. Where 've you been keeping yourself all these months? I've been wanting to see you for ever so long. Where 'd you get him, Bella?"

"He 's of age — ask him," she said.

"Down there by the river," Cleworth explained, as he tilted his hat on the rack with the only hand Mr. Werner allowed him.

"I was coming in to see you to-night about a little matter, but Bella said it was your habit to be abusive if anybody delayed your dinner, so knowing what a dangerous character you are I thought it my duty to come in and protect her."

"She said that, did she? — of me, the best father she 'll ever have? But I 'm glad she brought you in, even if she had to blacken my reputation to do it. Let 's have a look at you, Irve; you have n't grown any fatter, eh? Got a scheme of some sort, have you?"

"Well, a sort of a scheme. It 's about — mines," said Cleworth, looking at Belle.

The old man's voice suddenly dropped.

"You don't mean to say so! *Mines?* What kind of mines? Look here, Irve, if you 're interested, I can put you next to the finest thing in" —

But seeing the two conspirators smiling, he suddenly stopped and looked from one to the other suspiciously. "Bella, you 've been telling tales," he accused.

"You 're keeping us waiting for dinner,

poppa," said the lady virtuously. "Yes, I told tales some to Irve, but after this I shall leave you both to your fate. I find he 's as bad as you are."

Such levity was frothy perhaps. But hearts that are large and happy will go further sometimes in their nonsense than wise and narrow ones would dare to go for their dignity's sake; and the levity of these three was only the froth of deeper things that lay underneath.

But after dinner Cleworth's business was brought permanently on the table, and there was much serious discussion. And beside the open window, with dim, soft face cast in the shadow beyond the lamps, sat Belle, where his eyes could turn unerringly and rest upon her, and he was satisfied.

Mr. Thompson Werner liked the proposition.

"Yes, I should take it, Irve, if I were you. What they 're after is the right man to introduce their stock to the little fry of Wall Street, — small brokers, and fellows like me, you know. I 'll say for them that I don't

think they could have gone to a better man than you, Irve, for that job."

"Dutton said as much," said Cleworth, smiling. "You know him, don't you? I think I 'd have taken up with the idea sooner if I had liked the man a bit better. Not that I ever heard anything against him, you understand; only I never had much use for him, somehow."

"I know him. I used to see him around the brokers' offices, a bright fellow but seedy looking. Never seemed to judge the market right, and had n't sense enough to give it up and go away. You know the kind. Once in a while, though, a fellow like that falls on some wonderful luck, and when you hear from him again the world has turned round and calls him a financial genius. Now that may be the way with Dutton. I would n't turn down a fair proposal for a dislike of the man, Irve."

"No, I 'm not going to commit such a folly as that. I 'm not in the position," said Cleworth, and so the matter was settled.

A short silence fell. His eyes were again

terest deepened suddenly to an expression of consternation. Swiftly he turned them over one by one, like a man seeking confirmation of his fears and dreading that he will find it. Belle grew too intent in her own interest of observing him, to speak.

"What did you say the name of your concern was, Werner?" he finally asked. Something in his tone caused the old gentleman to look round quickly at him, but make no attempt to reply.

The hopes which Cleworth had secretly entertained of this venture were very evident now. He looked like a man who had been brought suddenly upon a crisis, as he laid the papers down quietly; but even Belle with her great loving interest in him could not perceive at once what the crisis was.

"Werner, there 's a swindle going on here somewhere. These views are the identical ones that Dutton showed me last night. You have been looking up this concern, you say. Who are the men in it?"

"*What?* Good heavens!" — Mr. Wer-

ner had found his voice at last. "Irve, you must be mistaken. I don't know any of them personally. They 're not New Yorkers; they 're fellows from out there. But nobody would dare to do such a thing as that. It would be a fool's trick."

"Yes, if it was discovered. Anyway it has been done, for I 'm not mistaken; and the only question that concerns me is, 'Is it the work of Dutton's men or yours?' A nice figure I 'd have made inviting my friends to walk into a little trap like that and be eaten, would n't I?"

"Tut, tut," said the old man feebly. He was too greatly taken off his feet at this discovery to say anything more forcible. "I 'm sorry — I 'm darned sorry, Irve. But Dutton may be able to explain yet, you know," he suggested.

His words carried more sympathy than conviction. Cleworth was looking down at the fateful papers on the table, but seeing other matters there, the débris of the things that were to have resulted from this: money, recovered honor, reinstatement in that world

of men and events that alone counted for him. Were they hopelessly lost, then? Was he such a pitiful thing that men like Dutton saw it and dared to use him as a tool? Bitterer than his disappointment and poverty was the dread that he had been duped, had been building a Paradise for himself out of a fool's dream.

It was Belle who relieved the situation. He knew she had come from the window, because he felt every movement of hers; and the tender raillery of her voice was as much for him as for her father, whose bald head she patted affectionately.

"Irve, don't give up yet. I don't know much about mines, but I know all about poppa, and you 'll find it is his proposition that's wrong — not yours. I told him this notion of his would get him into trouble. Now it has come. Poppa is getting just a little old and confiding about things, you see, only he is not quite old enough yet to believe it."

With inimitable caress she piled the slurs one after another upon Mr. Werner's shin-

ing, benevolent poll, and he looked more and more relieved. He hoped it was all as she said. The deception meant nothing to him — he had not even invested a dollar, thank the gods — but it was the whole future to poor Cleworth. And his dear brave Bella — even his old ears could detect that she was rallying the courage of the man she loved. Why should he be angry, even though he was a hearty, vigorous gentleman of sixty only? He was too sorry for them, and too fond of them both.

Cleworth went away soon afterwards. Perhaps the contrite, benevolent soul of Mr. Thompson Werner considered that his handiwork had been prominent enough that evening, for it was Belle alone who accompanied the visitor to the door. And there her hand lay for a moment in his.

"You will come back soon to tell us," she whispered. "I could n't wait so long again without knowing how it is."

"Yes — yes, dear," he answered her in a quick breath.

Her eyes were uplifted to him, dark and

starry in the tender light falling from above. There was a little white about her throat and a little red, and all the rest was rich soft rustling darkness. And the loose dark strands of her hair floated like an aureole about her face.

He looked down upon her with a pained, straining gaze. So hard grew his clasp that their hands were welded together, trembling. Ah, why should the way that was hard and cold be forever called honor, and this their true dear love be sin? Her red grieved lips, so near and sweet, overcame him with a physical weakness; his dark face grew flushed. He groaned and dropped her hand with a sharp jerk.

"Good-by," he whispered, "oh, Belle — Belle — God keep you, dear!"

"Good-by," she answered him through tears that stung, "good-by." There was no comfort anywhere; for both of them it must be always so.

Cleworth went at once to see Dutton, and that keen and angry gentleman, when he

had heard the news, indignantly suggested that the only way to settle the question was for Cleworth to go out and view their valuable and foully aspersed property with his own eyes. It was agreed that he should start the next day; and then Cleworth went back to his room, to find awaiting him there a letter forwarded under cover by his lawyers. The letter was from Leone.

CHAPTER XIX

A MATTER OF HONOR

It was a curious and characteristic letter. Who else beside Leone would have dared to rake together her own wrongdoing and make it a claim upon his further forbearance? Who else would have thought of coolly inviting him to immolate himself and his just rights to make a stepping-stone to assist her to her own desires? The appeal in the letter, for in spite of its defiant tone it was an appeal, struck him — who knew his own feelings of the afternoon, and now, and for many months past so well — as actually sardonic.

He had done her two great wrongs, she said, the first in marrying her. He had known her disposition; of late he had grown to call it extravagant, though she had never required anything of him that her position

as his wife should not have entitled her to. But grant that it was extravagant for his means — he had married her nevertheless and by that had falsely said to her and to the world that he was such a man as could properly support a wife. That was wrong. It was the great wrong which had made all her own shortcomings appear so much worse to him than they really were.

And then he had failed in business, and when she in distress had been forced to think of herself he had flown into a passion and left her; deserted her at that moment when she most needed his help. This was the worst wrong of all, which she could never forgive. She had suffered — horribly. But that was all over now. Life was going to be bright for her again. She was going to begin it all anew, with plenty of money and all those things he had been unable to give her assured. And since he had done her so much wrong in the past she requested that he would not make the future difficult by his interference. Love between them was dead. She was about to sue for a divorce

from him and she prayed him not to oppose it.

The letter closed with a cry of passion.

"I have the right to my own life—to live it as I am happiest. I hate sordid economies. You cannot make a caterpillar from a moth, and I have never known the caterpillar stage of existence. Do not think to teach me. I will not learn it. Let me go!"

Plainly she knew the weakness of her own position and feared him. Her own spirit exhaled from the cool impertinence of the charges and gave them force; evoked from him a grotesque kind of consideration. So much depended upon the point of view, and doubtless she had her grievance against him, he reflected. Doubtless it was as large in her eyes as his own grievance appeared in his. She was so dead to him that the allusion to her new life merely stirred his curiosity a little. She meant remarriage, of course. To whom? — he wondered. He knew Elsner had left the city and speculated for a moment on that possibility.

But of neither of these was he really think-

ing. Shadows they were, and behind them his mind was filled with one vision, one thought that rose and rose like the sea. His judgment and his sense of decency fought against it, but the waters were too deep. It was a whirlpool — a mighty, resistless, hope-inspired sweep of his long denied passion that was dragging down his soul and every power or sense he possessed. Suddenly he bent before it, and flinging his head down on his arms began to mutter in delirium such words as God or that sweet woman who loved him might hear, perhaps, but no one else. Ah, the dear dark eyes of her! They rose before him again out of the shadows. Had he not seen her love in them to-night? watched them turn to him? heard her say, "Come back. I cannot wait so long again until I know"? Here was the way back. By this sure, swift way he would go back to her in triumph. Had not fate by Leone's own unwitting hand opened the gate for him?

And she — Leone — had feared he would oppose her! He raised his head, and, flushed

and physically shaken with his thoughts, laughed. *He would not oppose her for the world!*

No? Again, in the loneliness of the chamber, he said it out aloud to himself, vehemently. He would not oppose her. — *Not he!*

Unwelcome thought came creeping back on him, — and troublesome reason, even love itself, cried out in protest, and opened indignant war upon love. What then? Still he would go back wisely and softly by the way that fate had opened — back to Belle whom an hour ago he had deemed lost. . . . Go back to her like that coward who ran before the battle was fought in the fear that afterwards might be too late to run? No, of course not. Save for conscience' and honor's and her sake there was no need to fight this battle. . . . Offer her a love that must inevitably wear something of a hang-dog air, tainted with just a suspicion of contrivance? No; the law would make it honorable. But heretofore had he not striven to save her from scandalous

tongues? Set them wagging now and forever of collusion — of her name and his? Was this the quality of the love he held her in? How would she look at him while he was explaining?

And yet how easy — oh God, how easy the way was! He had only to sit still; to refrain from lifting up his voice in protest against the dishonor that was to be thrown on him. What did he care for such dishonor? Other men bore it sometimes for a goal which was far less than his. Would Belle turn him away for it? No, perhaps not! Ah, but how could he, loving her so well, offer her a name so besmirched, and a heart that had lain content under so plausible a lie to win its way to her?

He did not go to bed, but paced the room all night with his problem, wherein even love itself was pulling him two ways. At last when the hot summer dawn was almost due he went to the open window, and leaning out restfully, saw where a single star was paling above the multitudinous, silent city roofs. There at least was serene purpose,

changeless strength, peace undimmed; so distant, so undisturbed by human destinies. His eyes ached. His mind lay still before eternal greatness — while out of the gulf of the firmament defined by dark human dwellings decision descended on him like a benediction. To do his duty — that was the only part required of man. He, Irving Cleworth, would do his, even to fighting this thing — this divorce — that he most desired. As for love and Belle — they were in the same Hand that held the fading star.

CHAPTER XX

CLARA'S FORGETFULNESS

THE house was very quiet and brooding, like the evening that was falling from a pale sky upon a world of housetops and streets. It had been a dull day. A little wind had risen and was blowing fitfully up and down the street, lingering around keyholes and window sashes with an occasional moan, as though the soul of the dying summer were passing down the year. Between the sounds a van rumbled over the cobbled pavement far below and the clang of cable cars tuned monotonously with the distant grind of elevated trains — all melancholy. Clara was alone in the house, listening to the gusts, weaving new intricate lace patterns with rapid energy. As the wind moaned, the weakened chords of her mind vibrated uneasily in response, and her light blue

eyes grew darker, more restless, and full of strange sparkle. After a while she threw down the lacework impatiently, and standing by the window looked watchfully out at the melancholy sky line of roofs opposite.

Down below, diminished dark figures moved to and fro, and the patter of their feet came up softly to the height. She was too far removed from them to belong to them. She and the wind were alone under the roof. The whole house seemed to be listening to it also, as she was. The windows across the street were blank like dead eyes that had lost the look of memory. They had a hateful fascination for Clara. Her own grew more watchful and intent, and into their insane brightness crept and mingled a look of fear. She too had an elusive memmory, something sinister that always lay in the background. What was it? On these sombre evenings, and when the wind rose and cried lonesomely, the memory would draw so near that it became a presence lurking about her in vacant rooms, lying in

wait behind hidden doors to which she was ever denied the key.

Physically Clara had quite recovered from her accident, but her mind was very sick. Certain curious mental developments had come about in her, at least one of which her friends could see and wonder at — the ability to evolve wonderful and beautiful designs in lace. For whole days she would sit silent and absorbed in her idea, like a painter before his picture, while fairy patterns sprang from beneath her fingers and the thread seemed at her touch to become magically alive. When asked for the secret of her designs she always said simply that she "saw them."

But another development which not even her most intimate friends fully realized was Clara's secretiveness, growing steadily, as it does in minds diseased. The constant terrible effort to remember — the pursuit of the mental shadow that hung always about her, as real yet as unreal as a cloud — all this the poor dying intelligence covered up with insane carefulness. She no longer dis-

cussed her own mental processes with her mother or even with Belle Werner. She kept them to herself, letting no one know that she spent the hours of her silence in straining, seeking, groping for a something that would not be recalled. And so no one suspected how far her malady had progressed toward the point of danger.

The unrest in the weather to-night affected her strangely. She began to feel a vivid presentiment of presences in the room, presences whose will toward her was harmful. It had frequently been so of late. She did not like to be alone, particularly in these hours between the lights. Turning, she walked the length of the room several times, and the feeling vanished. On a table where she had thrown it down her lace lay tangled and beautiful. She paused irresolutely beside it, but to her deranged sight the thing had grown strange and unfriendly and actually abhorrent, and she fled from it back to the window.

She pressed her hand with a quick, stealthy motion against her breast, against a hard

but comforting object that lay there. She always carried her little bronze dagger now, safely hidden inside her dress. On such nights as this, when the apparitions of her diseased fancy haunted her, it gave her a feeling of safety and protection to know it was there.

Presently that sense of horrid companionship crept upon her again. She knew what it was. It was the fugitive idea, the thing she could not remember, grown in her helpless secrecy and silence into a sentient being, a monstrous enemy without shape or corporal body, conscious but invisible. She had never dared to communicate this to any one. If they suspected her of such an awful knowledge and society as this they might think — well, no matter what they might think. She knew that the society was surely, fearfully there.

She snatched up a newspaper and sat down in a large chair close by the window. Her eyes were very bright indeed now, fearfully so. They seemed intent on the sheet, but their watchfulness was bent upon the

dusky room, searching out every corner of it, as one gathers many objects into the scope of vision while looking at some one thing.

Suddenly beneath her vagrant eyes the letters on the page seemed to draw together. Words sprang into life, charged with meaning, with memory as elusive, as subtle as a flash of lightning. What was it? The words were as commonplace and dull as the stones on the street, and yet somehow so achingly familiar, so full of something — something she ought to know. Painfully, intently, hardly breathing lest it escape her, she read the short paragraph.

"The suit brought by Mrs. Irving Cleworth for divorce from her husband, Irving Cleworth of this city, has been denied by the —— Courts. To most of their friends here this is the first intimation that such a suit was pending, and it will be greatly in the nature of a surprise to them. The troubles of the couple are said to have dated from Mr. Cleworth's failure some time ago, since which they have been living apart

from each other. Desertion was the offense charged by Mrs. Cleworth and stubbornly fought by the defendant. Mr. Cleworth will return at once to New York where he is claimed by new and successful business interests."

Over and over again Clara read, trembling with excitement. What was it? what did the writing hide from her? Why did those names stare at her like a familiar dead face, and tell her nothing? The answer was here in the room, quivering in the very air around her, yet invisible, beyond her grasp. Her head felt as though it would burst under the tremendous effort. She flung the paper aside and rose, staring blindly ahead in the attitude of listening, and feeling a fearful maniac desire to scream aloud.

It was all of no use. These wild efforts never produced anything more than that awful numbness that was creeping over her now like a pall. Not forgetfulness exactly, but just a pall, beneath which her mind would lie for hours stupefied and inert. Even the strong sense of familiarity was fading

now. What was it about those names? She could not remember ever having heard them before, but it had grown darker and the wind moaned softly around the window, and the unseen presence was in the room again. She was afraid.

The opening of a door and the sound of footsteps advancing up the dark little hall told her that her mother had returned. She called in a sharp hurried voice for a light that should drive away these phantoms of the twilight. Strangely, they were never so real when there were no dark corners for them to harbor in. Her face was pallid, and her shining eyes a little wild as she sank piteously into a chair, but in response to her mother's anxious looks she recovered herself sharply. The poor mind was instantly on the alert to guard its secret from all the world.

"Thank you, mother," she said, lifting the paper. "It grew dark so suddenly; I wanted to read and could n't see."

"Yes, it is dark. I am later than I expected to be. Let me get you to-day's paper, dear.

That is two or three days old at least; don't bother with it."

"Oh, so it is. I had n't noticed," said Clara carelessly. But while the old lady was gone she secreted the paper.

The mother and daughter slept in adjoining rooms, of which the communicating door was always left open at night for the sake of the pleasant sense of security imparted. Some time in the night Mrs. Manning awoke, not to the usual sleepy half-consciousness of midnight, but to the wide-awake intelligence of noonday. The light burned peacefully in the hall outside the two rooms and not a sound disturbed the quietude, but the vague prescience of ill which had brought the old lady awake kept her so. Ill, for her, could be associated only with misfortune or danger to Clara, so she lay waiting and intently listening, with her eyes fixed on the open doorway into her daughter's room, whence the sense of harm had seemed to come. The silence was so great that it seemed unnatural even for midnight. At last her straining ears heard a faint sound

issue from the next room, and she rose swiftly and went in.

Clara, tall and shadowy in her white night-gown, stood in the dim light, fast asleep. Her eyes were closed, but as she slowly advanced every movement of her body was electric with subconscious baleful intent, and the expression of her face made her mother's heart stand still. In one hand she grasped some inert thing which seemed a newspaper, though her way of holding it rather suggested a weapon. For a second Mrs. Manning paused in bodily fear, then she went quickly up to the poor apparition and laid one hand caressingly on its face while with the other she caught the menacing arm gently and drew it down. Mother's love was in the old lady's voice; this was her only daughter.

"Clara, my dear," she said clearly.

No voice in the world can intone "my dear" like a mother's. Perhaps it was for this, or the kind hand on her cheek, that Clara opened her eyes with a sudden shock and a low startled cry.

"Come back to bed, my daughter. You 've been dreaming — and you 're not feeling very well."

But Clara looked at her strangely, then glanced swiftly round the room with eyes fierce and bright. Even in that light the mother could see the look in them, and grew weak with terror.

"They are not — there is no one — here then?" said a voice that was not Clara's.

"No dear, no one but me. Don't be frightened. What was it? Tell mother."

"Oh, I thought, I don't know — nothing," said Clara in a bewildered fashion. Then she put her hand to her forehead and began to sob with a child's grief. "I forget, mammy. I was dreaming — something about Mr. and Mrs. Irving Cleworth of New York."

Tremblingly the mother helped her back into bed, and then, creeping to her own, wept such tears as we must sympathize with for the terrible wrecking of her only daughter's life and happiness.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER THE VERDICT

AFTER the scene in that distant courtroom where he had fought and gained a man's battle for honor Cleworth went to see Leone. God knows it was not love that sent him, but his chivalrous duty to her, and an honest sense of protection, and some pity perhaps too; for his own experience taught him that she probably suffered. If she truly loved elsewhere, as her letter intimated, he could find it in his heart to be sorry for her, since it was the same mill that was grinding them both. And since he had not found Elsner in her vicinity, as he had half anticipated, he felt the readier to soften toward her. She had eluded him after the verdict, but that had only made it necessary that he should go to her hotel, so with characteristic pertinacity he went.

He had sent up his card, and plunged in his own not roseate thoughts was awaiting the answer, when, as chance or blind justice would have it, he caught sight through the open doorway of a man passing down the street and instantly recognized him. Blond, strong, and self-possessed as ever, it was Elsner himself; the fellow looked exactly as he had looked on that night when he sat and admired his own chrysanthemums in Leone's parlors.

In his anger at the sight Cleworth forgot his own private griefs. She could be as shameless as that then! He had been wiser after all to go away without a sign, and abandon her to the lot she evidently preferred to his clean name and home and honest poverty. For here was proof that if not guilty in the letter, in the spirit she was guilty. And to flaunt her preferences in this way was indecent. He, a mere man, would have taken the proprieties a little more into account.

And yet, because he was a man and a just one, he did not go. He said to himself that

he would form no hasty or unworthy conclusion on such evidence as that. She was his wife still — there was the spell. She bore his name; and his Anglo-Saxon chivalry toward women said: "She has a claim on you. Because her good name is in danger you must protect it. She is yours, and you hold her against her will. Guard her then against all the world."

Then the messenger came for him and he followed, determined to extend to her, his wife, the protection and reconciliation without which his victory over her would be merely a cruel farce.

She smiled upon him icily, and did not extend her hand; and across the more than formal space she put between them, her beautifully wide golden-brown eyes flashed her enmity on him.

"Well? You have come to take me home?" she inquired. "That is next, I suppose?"

"If you will come, Leone. I wish you would. It will be best," he said quietly.

"Best? — how? — for whom?"

The question was arrogance itself, but he

did not wish his first greeting to be an insult, and so it was his eyes, not hers, that fell. "I saw Mr. Paul Elsner downstairs," he said quietly at last, and looked straight at her.

"Did you?" she whispered at him. "Well? Please be more explicit. What do you attach to that fact that you should mention it to me?"

"Don't!" he said vehemently. "It is not I, but the world that will construe a meaning from it if it knows. Don't be childish, Leone. You know life as well as I do. Unfortunately for both of us perhaps, I am your husband still — but I would be your friend and protect you also. For your own interest's sake don't stay here. Come back with me."

His genuineness put the power into her hands; and she took up his own words and slowly repeated them after him.

"Yes, unfortunately you are my husband still; you would be my friend, and protect me also? Really — would you? I asked for the only act of friendship I wanted of you —

to let me free myself of you. I gave you the reason. Why did you not do it if you were my friend?"

Why? What could he answer her? He had striven to be honest, but in that moment she had found the way to make even his honesty appear a questionable thing. Was it partly for another woman's sake then that he had not let this one go?

He answered falteringly.

"I would have done it if I could. You asked the impossible. A man cannot sink his name and his honor so low as that. Don't think of that. Help me to make the best of our position, and I will make your life as little unpleasant as I can. Come. You see that you cannot stay here alone after I go."

"I will not come!" she cried in a fury. "I do not love you. I will have no more of your penury and your sordid economies. I despise them; and I will live my life my own way as I wish to live it. Hear me" — in the exaltation of passion her small figure swelled into a kind of pathetically distorted great-

ness. "You think I am just your wife Leone — that doll that chattered of fashions and morality? No; I have found myself. I can forgive a woman for falling now, for I can conceive that she might be tempted far enough. Oh, don't look so alarmed. I am not speaking of my own case, and I can assure you that, for love at least, I shall never fall. But I asked you to give me back my life. I could have been happy then as well as good. I could have had everything — money *and* love. Yes, look shocked if you like, it matters nothing to me."

Nevertheless she stopped, for he had come over with eyes full of sad authority and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Hush, poor Leone. You are excited by this morning's disappointment. I am sorry it has been quite so heavy." Then moved to stern pity by this spectacle of her weakness and her stormy, unhappy passion he made one more effort to rescue her — his wife.

"You 're overwrought," he said with great gentleness. "Come, I 'll help you pack your things, and we 'll get away from this place.

We 'll make an effort together — shall we not? And it may be by and by that time will intervene and help us both. Come, Leone."

But she moved resolutely away from him, calmer now, realizing to the full the finality of the moment.

"No, I won't go with you," she said.

Then his bearing changed in an instant. They confronted each other, speechless; but his dark angry masculine eyes were shooting a terrible question at her. "What, then?" And she shrank, but her color rose, hot, guilty, defiant.

"Damn it all, you must come!" he burst out. "You don't know what you 're saying. You 're gone mad. Your reputation, Leone! Your own name, if mine is nothing to you! It 's utterly impossible for you to stay here where that man is."

She was no coward, and shame, which might have helped her to be one, was dead. Even as the words tumbled incoherently from his lips he felt the uselessness of them.

"Leave me," she whispered, pointing to

the door. "Perhaps I am mad. You might reflect on it, for it is your doing. You won your fight to-day, did n't you? and I am your wife, am I not? But I passed out of your life last Christmas — and you out of mine."

More terrible than the unspoken denunciations which leaped to his lips, which would once and for all have scathed and dishonored her in the ears of both of them, was the silence in which he turned and followed her pointing finger. Yet the woman in her would rather have heard them than been blasted by his scorn as he paused at the door and looked his last on her. Contempt — pity — these could pierce her armor.

"You" — he said in a voice scarcely audible, — "unhappy; you are making your own level, and never fear but that you will reach it. Your punishment is time."

So he had failed to save her; and that spectacle of her abasement had sent him away shocked and startled, and yet, in spite of cool reason, filled with a pained sense of responsibility. Had he done a little evil to

his own advantage, and given this willful soul her freedom, how much greater good would have resulted to them all!

And that night as the train rushed eastward with him his heart bade its own good-by to love — to Belle. No further thought of her now, God help them both. The frail thread that might some day have drawn them together had been cut — cut by himself. And to what end? Only, it seemed, to push unhappy Leone over the brink. Ah, had he been a mere meddlesome fool after all, meddling in his own destiny and the destinies of — how many other souls? God knew. At least he had tried to do what seemed a man's duty. No man could do more than that.

And Leone, poor girl, what would the outcome of it all be for her? Was there a reasonable doubt with which he could comfort himself? She was mad, bewitched by her old greed for gold, and for it had turned her back upon everything that a woman holds dear to the last. The fall of her pride that had once been so overweening stung him and moved him to pity in spite of his disgust.

And he might have averted it all from her. It would have been so much easier than what he had done. He felt that the problem of right and wrong was unreasonably hard and difficult, yet he had no choice but to keep on endeavoring to puzzle it out somehow — and there would be all his life to do it in.

he had gone off alone and stood up to his trouble in silence like a man. Mr. Werner's heart grew big. He had a deep-seated kindness for Cleworth, and that he and Belle should be in love with each other was to him a tragedy, made the more pitiful by the wordless loyalty and Spartan rectitude of both. But then it is doubtful whether Mr. Werner would not under any circumstances have sympathized with Belle.

As he looked at the hard, matter-of-fact paragraph in the newspaper it seemed to him that he could read in it the temptation, the hard struggle, and the high resolve that lay behind. To be tempted like that — for to a man who loved his Bella, as Cleworth did, the temptation must surely have been great — and yet to win! Belle was not so far out of the way after all in loving him. He, her old father, could love such whiteness in a man; and for one thoughtful minute the elderly eyes behind the glasses lost sight of the newspaper in seeing what might have been — perhaps — if Cleworth had lost and Leone had won. For he was a gentleman

of very modern ideas in spite of his age, and his daughter's happiness was a very tender concern of his.

Right into the midst of this excursion of his fancy came Belle herself, all in a morning gown of silk; not the faded Enid style of silk, but pearly white and lustrous and soft, and incrusted with lace as rare and fine as poor Clara's diseased genius could make it. Mr. Werner spirited the newspaper into the background till he should decide how to tell her; she would not want that news for a breakfast table item, poor daughter. But she had seen the letter.

"Got a letter here from Irve. Says he 's going into the Tin Bucket, Bella," he said, smiling as he caught her glance at it.

She laughed. Poor Belle — this was the first news they had heard for so long — and her color became a little unsteady.

"Is he? He must have found it trustworthy after all, must n't he?" Then her eyes gleamed quizzically — "And poppa and Pompadora? Did he happen to mention them, poor old dears?"

Mr. Werner reluctantly admitted that Cleworth had mentioned something about them.

"But you know, Bella, I was very cautious about that scheme. I investigated. I never put a red cent into it. You forget" — Here Belle held out her hand for the letter. "No, I 'll read you his note; it 's only a note. He 's coming up shortly to see us and report." So Mr. Werner read the letter aloud to his daughter, but omitted the postscript.

"An impudent fake — the Pompadora!" she said solemnly. "Poppa, if I were you I would n't stand it."

"Eh? How d' you mean? — What would n't you stand, my dear?"

"I would n't stand corrected in my opinions like that. It is n't respectful of Irve. You were cautious. You investigated. And you told him it was the finest investment in the country. To be exact, you said it was a regular cinch. I heard you myself."

"Bella darling!"

His deprecating air was so funny and so

kind, Belle's eyes grew brighter. "Well, I did hear you. Poppa, I 'll give you another cup of coffee, won't I? You 've let that one grow stone cold."

He passed his cup over, thinking guiltily of the newspaper on the floor, and wondering whether she suspected him of anything, that she should relent so easily.

He gleaned nothing from her face. Arrayed like the lilies of the field, proud, tender, she was his very daughter, a fitting branch of such a fine old root as himself. Her low dark coiffure gleamed sombrely above her brow and cheek as all beautiful hair should, and her eyes, darker yet, were starry. It was Cleworth's coming back that had done that. His heart ached to see her thus. He wanted to tell her the news and discuss it with her in a friendly, casual fashion, but he could n't think of any suitable opening, so he began to talk around it in a circle.

"To think now, of a fellow like Dutton falling on his feet in an enterprise like that. Irve's in a fair way to get a few of those

millions, Bella. Well, I 'm glad — very glad. I suppose Leone 'll be coming back to him now. She 'll make it fly."

" Probably," said Belle in a low voice as she handed him back his coffee, which spilled over ever so slightly into the saucer.

" Yes, I should n't wonder at all if she came back," he repeated with twofold conviction. It seemed the most likely thing indeed, knowing what he did.

" She 's got her point of view too, I suppose. Everybody has, or there 'd be no trouble in this world," he resumed. " Women want such a lot nowadays. They have to carry as many things as a ship, or they 'll tell you at once they 're not in the fashion. You can see yourself they 're not, by the look of them. Bella, I don't suppose their grandmothers used to have so many fashions and fal-lals, do you ? "

He was veering rather wide of his mark, as he was apt to do when mounted on this hobby.

" No, I don't suppose they had quite so many, poppa," said Belle. " Fathers and

husbands were less liberal and well to do in those days for one thing, and they expected women to take a serious view of life. I think you 'll find " — she paused, smiling at him in a personal manner — " I think you 'll find the whole secret is that our grandmothers' fathers knew how to bring them up more sensibly, poppa."

" Eh ? Well, well, maybe so. You can't say I ever spoiled you though, Bella."

" Quite the contrary," she gravely assented. " I should say that as a parent you were a rigid disciplinarian. You never gave me pocket money on the sly when I was little and poor mamma thought I should n't have had it. You never gave me a larger allowance than any other girl I ever knew. And of course you never hinted to me that the sun rose and set for my special little benefit, or taught me by experience that I could get any old thing in the world I wanted by asking you for it. Spoiled me ? Poppa, of all the closefisted, crabbed old dears " —

" Tut, tut," said Mr. Thompson Werner.

Laughing they rose from the table, and

he went over to a sunny window to be brushed. While she flicked invisible dust from his stout, genteelly-clad shoulders he looked out at the sunshine.

"Lovely day, Bella." How was he going to bring in that item about Cleworth?

"Lovely! Fall will be coming soon. They 're going to wear trains this fall," said Belle reflectively.

"Tr— wear *trains?* The deuce now, Bella!" he expostulated in astonishment.

"Yes, on the dresses, you know," she explained. "Either one will have to buy all new dresses this season, or else stitch a piece to the bottom of the old ones." She smiled. "I 'm glad you made so much money out of Pompadora, poppa."

The old man turned himself round and scrutinized her carefully. "I never made a cent out of Pompadora. You know I did n't," he averred with indignation.

"You did n't? Oh, you 're mistaken — you must be mistaken. Why, you made ten thousand dollars at least. Anybody will tell you that 'a thousand dollars saved is a

thousand dollars gained' — or words to that effect. Poppa, don't you deny that you made ten thousand dollars."

Mr. Werner grunted. "If you look at it that way, I suppose! — But it's paper profit."

"It's ten thousand dollars," Belle solemnly corrected, "and only for me you'd have lost it. And poppa, I'm awfully hard up. Please let me have one thousand of it — won't you?"

He gasped and opened his mouth; but the word he wanted was not in his vocabulary, so he closed it again helplessly, and took off his shining glasses. Certainly he had been prepared to indulge Belle this morning, but how was he to have foreseen this?

"Belle," he articulated impressively, "you're positively beyond anything. Talk about leeches! Do — you — mean — to tell me — you're without money again?"

"*Temporarily* only, poppa," she corrected with an air. "I'm sorry, but I never seem to have any left over. If you won't give it me I'll have to sew on a piece round the bottom and go that way. They'll put me

in a dime museum," she concluded graphically, moving unconsciously into the sunlight where the white silk morning gown glistened ludicrously.

"But, my goodness, you can get a train for less than a thousand dollars, can't you?"

"Well, yes — but there are other things; fal-lals, you know." But suddenly she stopped. So close were her moods this morning that even while she smiled at his indignant perplexity tears stood in her eyes.

"Poppa," she said softly in that quick change of mood, "there 's poor Clara, too." Then she went on rapidly, "I 'm ashamed to trouble you. I meant to do it myself, but — well, I 'm such an incurable spendthrift, and it 'll be weeks yet before I get any more money. Clara is much worse. Her mother is frightened. She thinks Clara will do some one a mischief unless she is properly taken care of somewhere. But they have very little means, you know; I want to help them. If you 'll give me the thousand," said Belle very soberly, "I 'll go without trained dresses this season."

Here Mr. Werner's feelings went off in a series of jerks like little explosions that gave one the impression of intense indignation.

"Impossible, Bella! Nothing of the kind! I won't countenance it. You'll make a fright of yourself not to wear what the rest of the women are wearing. I won't have you a dowdy — I hate 'em! I 'll give you a check for the Mannings now. And as for the trains — you draw on me for 'em till your own money comes. You mind me, Bella."

"Don't!" she cried, struggling between tears and laughter. "Oh, poppa, you old darling, you can't get a train without a dress any more than you can get coat-tails without a coat. And fifty dollars will buy me one that will do for the present nicely." She stooped and kissed the top of his bald head. "Oh, do you suppose any of those old grandmothers was ever so badly brought up as your daughter, poppa?"

"Tut, tut," he said again, then laughed. "I 'll bet they were every one the same, my dear."

Then as he was going he blurted out the news which had been troubling him so all this time. "By the way, Irve sent a paper. There 's a piece of news in it I ought to have mentioned, but we have n't time to discuss it now. Leone is n't behaving very nicely, I 'm afraid. I 'm sorry for them — Irve especially. But he 's made of the right stuff, that fellow. I always knew he was, and now it 's showing."

And Belle was left alone — dear white statue standing in the sweet sunlight, very silent, very still — to read as any stranger might what life had required of the man who loved her.

She stood there a long time, striving against the weary ache that had fallen on her heart. It was as though a door had been closed somewhere, which yet had never existed. It was reprehensible to feel so. Things were just the same; neither this nor anything in life could alter them. There had never been any hope for Cleworth or her and they had both known it; and yet it seemed, incomprehensibly, that this thing

had thrust them a thousand miles further apart.

The maid who came in presently to clear off the breakfast table glanced curiously at her usually alert, fastidious mistress. Belle forced herself to give the girl some perfunctory orders about the morning's work, and then feeling very tired drew a chair near the window and sat down.

Why had he done it? — why, loving her, had he not let Leone go if she wished it? her heart bitterly cried at first. The answer came from within herself. She knew why he had done it, knew that he could not have done anything else, knew that she would not have wanted him to do anything else. How could he have come to her with such a cloud upon him? Oh, it was the inevitableness of it that hurt most. The millstones were so huge and hard, and their two hearts so weak and loving. Ah, how bleak — how black was the sunshine now! Into her dark eyes had come a tired-childish look, and a strained note into her beautiful low voice. Irve had gone further off; the world was

slipping away; and all the childishness left in her was gathering itself together and leaning out toward the one rock in sight. "Poppa, dear old poppa," she murmured only half consciously. Was anything else in the world firm now but that?

She was under thirty still. When the sharp hand of real trouble strikes, we who are much older than that drop all our worldliness and our pleasant debonair smiles and pretenses and cry as she did for the presence that has always comforted and been tender to us.

In truth Cleworth had gone further off from her. She felt a certainty that when he came to see her again it would be to bid her a final good-by. What else remained for him after this? By this act he had insisted before the whole world on his position as Leone's husband, and the world would proclaim him doubly a sham and a hypocrite if it knew now that he loved *her* — Belle Werner. It would look upon their love as it looked on muddy water, that hard, unthinking, censorious world that would never understand the pain they suffered. Was it

nothing that they had remained joyless and silent for honor's sake? Was there no beauty or purity then in love unless it was also fortunate and happy? She turned swiftly from that window where the prim insufferable brown houses stood in a row and seemed to overlook her. There was another window that looked down upon the trees growing by the river. There they had walked together last time. Her eyes stung now with tears. He was coming to see her again, he said, but it was only to bid her good-by.

A long time after that the little maid came back again, bringing his card. He had followed his letter so swiftly. And in another minute he was in the room; and with her hand in his vibrating clasp she was trying to receive him as though they were only two good friends who had met again after a long absence and found no reason why they should be sad in each other's presence.

"My!" she said with her sweet low laugh, "we just got your letter this morning, and

we 're so glad, poppa and I, that the business is turning out so splendidly. Poppa says you 'll be a millionaire before we know it. Would n't it be funny to have you a millionaire, Irve?"

"Millionaire?" he laughed; "not just yet. Good friends make a man conceited about his own importance. Your father did n't go into that scheme of his, did he, Bella?"

"No, oh no. Poor poppa — I teased him about it this morning when your letter came, and he looked so absurdly sensitive."

Their hands fell apart from the vibrating clasp. Beside them on the table lay Cleworth's newspaper, and as he saw it his eyes turned to her in faint question.

But she only said, all trembling, "Poppa 's gone. He 'll be so sorry to have missed you."

"Ah — then you know?"

So quiet were the words that they fell like a whisper on the stillness of the room. Neither had moved, but Belle looked out of the window and nodded slightly.

"I did n't expect to find your father.

Belle, I came to see you, if you don't mind. I want to speak to you."

"Oh — to me?" she whispered.

"Yes. I won't do it again, but we 've been friends for a great many years — fifteen, is n't it, Bella? — and I had to come this once; it would have hurt me inexpressibly to think that perhaps you had misunderstood me, misjudged my — my friendship for you. How am I to explain to you? I can't explain — but you know what has happened. God that made me can tell what the cost has been, Bella, for I have shipwrecked my own life; but if I had done as I wished I would have been unworthy to come here to you. And I can never come again. Belle — you know why I can't, don't you? I must say good-by to-day."

He held out his hand beseechingly, but she stood motionless, looking still at the gliding river and the untroubled, peaceful hills of the other shore. Was it only hearts that must suffer and be so torn apart in this world? she was silently crying. He stood behind her looking at nothing in all

the world except her — for this was good-by in truth. What did he care that it was a lover's attitude or that his voice was love-shaken?

"Belle, are you angry with me?"

She turned round with a sobbing, sharp breath, holding out both her hands to him. Her eyes were full of tears. "No — no, Irve," she whispered.

"Oh," he cried, "my love — my love!" and for a moment they looked at each other with sad, straining eyes. Her tears were washing at the barriers of his locked-in passion. Was it, could it be after all, but a myth that kept him away from her grieved, beautiful lips, from kissing the trouble out of her dark, loving eyes? Right and wrong were growing murky in the tempest of his soul.

"Bella, dearest, you can see — you know what I would say if I might? If I only might — my God!" he burst forth huskily. A tremor seemed to shake the words out of him without his control.

"Oh," he groaned in shame and grief,

"send me away, Belle. Send me before I lose myself and offend you."

"Oh, my dear, hush," said the sobbing whisper.

So fashionably attired, so ineffably worldly, so tender, so simply Belle — she wiped her eyes with a tiny handkerchief as exquisite as herself, and her dear low voice trembled.

"Irve, they say that in old times when a knight went riding forth his love helped him don his armor, and gave him her colors to wear as a pledge of her love. And, dear — if we never meet again I have given you this pledge" — she raised his strong dark hand clasped on hers, and softly, inaudibly kissed it. "Ah, if there was wrong in what you said just now, half of it shall be mine. I love you, dear" She looked bravely into his eyes, secure in her sorrow and her purity, and whispered, "Irve — go."

And Cleworth bowed his head upon their clasped hands and breathed his farewell to her in broken, distracted words that told of a farewell that was to be for all time.

He was gone. Long after he had left her she stood still drearily there by the window. So long, as girl and woman, to have loved him, and to have sent him away now with her own lips into a separation inexorable as death. The tears which in his presence had been checked came now, slow and unheeded. Ah, the great silent tears of dumb womanhood that bring no balm such as the tears of younger days bring; they are slow because they come from the heart, which in those hours unseen of the world is parting with the last of its youth and light and hope.

He was gone. The low line of the river, majestic, blue, and the calm highlands of the farther shore, joyously clear in the morning light, why did they smile on as though the world had not grown old to-day, and the blight of long winter had not struck every living thing? For them the sun, and summer-time, and their young greenness would return. Hearts alone grew old and broken and forlorn forever, and passed on down life's vanishing years hopelessly looking back.

He was gone. And with him had vanished the last of those meagre glimpses of light and happiness which love had brought them both too tardily. And yet life was here, inexorable and impertinent, waiting to be lived on in the same old way. Poor Belle revolted from its bitterness, and cried out weakly that she could not do it.

Not to-day! Not while the enveloping atmosphere was vibrating still with his voice, while her hand felt the warmth of his breath, while his heart and hers bled still from their parting. Gone he was into the great world, to lose himself from her among other men and suffer there alone. She must suffer here, where he had left her. Ah, why? Because society said that they must? Yes, but for something even better than that; for their high manhood and womanhood — and for conscience' and each other's sake.

Only one small thing remained now to be done. To Belle it seemed a sacrament — like that last turning point in the road from whence the future claims us, but behind

which lies the place we love. She must care for Clara Manning, and put her in some place where her malady was well understood, and where her reason might be restored some day if it was not already hopelessly lost. There was comfort in extending protection to this poor wrecked vessel, lost in the storm that had so crippled her own strong self.

So Belle purposed to go to Clara tomorrow. At first she had meant to go today, but one day could make no difference. Yet — mark the unsuspected importance of little things — Clara's departure was thereby deferred for just a single additional day, and that made all the difference in the world.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEMORY

CLARA was very tired and irritated, but submissive. She and her mother had been traveling for some hours, because Belle, whose friendship was to be relied upon, and who understood things better than any one else, had advised it. One ought always to go away after sickness, Belle said. The change was beneficial; and there was, besides, a place where the trouble in Clara's head might be carefully treated at the same time, and where there was — not a promise, but oh, a wonderful possibility that her memory might be given back to her. For that possibility Clara would have borne any hardship uncomplainingly.

"Better break your journey at Philadelphia," Belle had said as she left them at the train. "Clara will be so tired. I should stop

overnight at the Olcott, I think, and go on in the morning. It 's only a little way further."

Belle had done the best she could; but had she or some one concerned been more sophisticated in mental disease and the terrible unexpectedness of its phases at times, Clara would have been better safeguarded on that journey. The distorted cunning of insanity, so often directed to one end, — to escape detection, — baffles even experts, and how therefore was Belle to know?

By the time they arrived at the Olcott Clara was holding herself by a tremendous effort. Up the softly carpeted halls where her feet left no echo, in the wake of her mother and the attendant, yet alone in a world of fancies, she went. The noiseless receding corridors, red-shaded lights, and the subdued buzzing of voices ascending from below — she alone at the centre of all reality knew that none of these things were what they were named. All things partook of a strange dual personality; everything was a conscious something else. Even the pieces

of furniture looked at her with faces that understood. Her fatigue vanished. She grew conscious of an all but irresistible desire to run, to talk out loud about the strange new aspect of things, and to laugh and gesticulate and explain about it to every one.

Midnight came at last; but though she had been for some hours in bed she could not sleep. Excitement and the weird novelty she alone discerned in everything around made her wider awake than she could remember ever having been before. In the darkness just beyond the swath of dim light that fell from the little dressing room across the gloom of the larger chamber she could discern her mother's face. It was turned toward her, but the place where the eyes should be was a shifting vagueness which by turns seemed to her to grow dark as though the eyes were open and observing her, and anon was dissolved again into the undetermined white outline of the face. The sound of the sleeper's breath was light and wandering — so light that in the darkness and stillness even the inanimate objects

in the room seemed to have grown ears, and to listen.

Clara raised herself lightly in the bed, the better to partake of this universal act of listening. She was not at all afraid now, as she had formerly been. She belonged to this world of inanimate things, which was, in fact, the real world; and she whispered to the dim listening shapes, and laughed noiselessly to herself as she found that they understood. It was her mother alone who could neither see nor understand. Scornfully but very quietly Clara slipped out of bed to the floor.

There was not a sound in the house but that light breath. She felt an unutterable exhilaration, a mad, eager desire for action, movement of some kind, a rushing sense through all her limbs of unlimited strength and power. She would go forth and be alone — she, in the great sleeping, foolish world; and she opened the door very stealthily and looked out. For secrecy, the dominant passion still, required that no one but herself must know.

A light burned low at either end of the corridor, but the attendant's chair was vacant, and Clara drew round her a light robe and slipped out of the room like a shadow.

Ha! She could not suppress her laughter, but she pressed her sleeve tightly across her mouth to smother it. She was escaped — alone — free! Oh, the delight of outwitting everybody in this way. Strange that she had never done it before. Her feet trod on air. No one should turn her back. She was stronger than ten thousand men. She wished to shriek out the ecstasy of her pleasure — only that would have awakened the world. Exulting, she hung above the balustrade of the dimly lit, quiet stairway and heard very faintly, as though from a great distance, the whispering of voices arise from the floor beneath.

Suddenly another sound reached her and she drew back with a start. Some one was coming along the corridor which she had just left — a woman in a rustling silk dress who would in another moment turn the corner and be upon her. Looking round for an

escape she almost screamed in the fright of discovering close at her elbow a second figure, ghostly pale and quiet, whose proximity she had not before noticed. She fled precipitately with bare feet down the stairs, too unhinged to even recognize her own image reflected in a window.

Stirring slightly, as though moved by some unnoticed air-current, a dark curtain was stretched across a doorway directly facing the foot of the stairs, and Clara crossed the passage with inaudible feet and passed noiselessly out of sight.

She had come into a small hall or vestibule communicating with a suite of rooms and curtained within by a second drapery. And from the room beyond the second curtain came the voices which at a distance she had thought whispered. She stood still — a graven image in whose bound brain the forgotten springs of life and memory were awake at last and vibrating.

They vibrated unintelligently at first.

Said a voice she had known long ago somewhere — and hated: —

"Hush! What was that, Paul? I heard some one passing."

"Did you? This is a public hotel, is n't it? What a little coward you are at bottom, are n't you? By George, I hope you 're mistaken about that other matter, though."

"I 'm not mistaken. I saw their names on the register while you were signing; there were about a dozen entries between you. We must change hotels immediately — yes, we must, I say! Do you think I will run the risk of meeting them in the morning?"

"It would be deucedly trying for Mrs. Irving Cleworth — me too, I 'll admit. But Clara would n't harm you; poor good little fool, she 's on my conscience yet."

"Pah! Do you imagine I fear her that way? It 's the scandal. Don't forget if you please that I at least have a reputation to lose."

By the sound that followed it seemed that Elsner laughed.

A great flood of light had pierced the brain of that spell-bound figure in the passage. Clara raised her forefinger, laughing

at the fierce renewed inrush of energy she felt in her body. "Ah," she said with a soft, wild, fearful intonation, — "Ah!"

Let the doctors explain how it was. It was not a sane woman, but a terribly remembering one that leaped down the passage and tore aside the screen and burst upon that conference and upon the stricken sight of the conferees. A supper table from which they had just risen stood near, brilliant beneath a shaded cluster of electric lights, and below the two figures stood revealed in white light, but their faces were enveloped in the shadow cast by the globe. While they stared speechlessly on the apparition words unintelligible to them fell from her lips: "Oh my God, yes, I remember now. Yes, yes — I remember now."

Her feet were bare, her hair disheveled as she had risen from her pillow. Reason, partially reseated by this shock, flashed accusingly in her fierce light blue eyes.

Leone's voice first broke the silence.

"Pardon me, Clara — have n't you mistaken your room?" she whispered with pal-

lid, trembling, sarcastic lips, and pointed to the naked feet.

Silently, just as she had laughed outside in the passage, Clara began to laugh here. "I? — no, madam. Not unless you have mistaken yours, perhaps. Did n't you hear him laugh at you — that Paul? Wherever you are, I belong; why — you Mrs. Irving Cleworth — all this time I have been looking for you."

Leone shrank involuntarily a little nearer to the man. That this diabolical laughing virago should have arisen from the ruins of meek-faced, insignificant Clara Manning was grotesque, frightful.

"You are mad," she faltered; "crazed, to say such things. I will call help and have you put out."

"Call — scream! Tell them I have found you, Mrs. Irving Cleworth, who robbed me of my last chance of happiness; who — who has mistaken Mr. Paul Elsner's room for hers. Ah, you were so good, were n't you? But you dragged your husband down, everybody said so. I have read that he failed.

You did it, and then you left him, I suppose. You had squeezed that lemon dry — and so you had to take another."

Clara's voice was rising and her eyes were growing alarmingly bright. Elsner, ignorant of her malady and only fearing lest she attract undesirable attention to the room, advanced with the intent to pacify her. It had never been a difficult task for him in the old days.

"Come now, Clara, my dear — don't make a scene. Don't be unreasonable. We 're just as good friends of yours as we always were, but time you know *will* change people's ideas and feelings. Come, sit down, and I 'll ring for some more supper and we 'll all be amicable again."

She put out her hand as though to push him off. She heard him not. Like some dreadful spirit of prophecy she continued still to stare past him at the now badly frightened Leone, the shadow that lay on her intent face assuming the look of a portent as her denunciation rushed on.

"Why, how I have forgotten" — now the

sarcastic words were a mere breath — "I seem to have forgotten a great deal that referred to you, Mrs. Cleworth. You could not help your nature, could you? I know you, you 're the horse-leech's daughter, are n't you? It was about you that the minister preached the very last Sunday before I fell and forgot so much that I wanted to remember. 'The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give.' Yes, that 's it. Two? Oh, merciful God, I could have told him better than that. The world is full of you."

She stood with pitifully clasped hands as a sudden frenzy of grief seized her, catching her words and breaking them into short sobs. But her eyes were dry. The glitter in them now of revealed insanity seemed to have dried up tears forever.

"Look out, Leone; she 's mad. We must get rid of her quietly," said Elsner under his breath. Then aloud: —

"Oh, never mind Leone. Don't look at her, Clara, look at me. Why, you 'll catch a cold, dear, without your shoes and stock-

ings. Now if you 'll go back to your room and put them on we 'll come up there to see you. Would n't you like me to come calling on you again, Clara ? "

Caressingly, with the air of a conqueror, he threw his arm about her, exerting slight force to draw her away. Perhaps that was his mistake. At his touch she grew deceitfully still, motionless. Suddenly looking up into his face she laughed. " You — you Paul ? " Her hand passed with lightning swiftness beneath her robe and back again. " Why, Paul, I 've been looking for you too. You did love me, did n't you — till she came and drove us both mad ? — *mad !* "

There was no time to cry out. A dull gleam flashed in the shadow, and her laughing face, her breast, her fierce mad little hands were red with his blood. Ghastly, he staggered back, his hands sprawled against the wall for support — his blood was welling out in cataracts — now he was falling on his hands and knees. And his eyes turned dimly to Leone.

" She 's done it. Help — call help. Le-

one — call " — His voice seemed a mere sigh.

" Oh ! " she moaned in white-lipped terror " oh no, I can't. Don't die, Paul — you 'll ruin me. Oh I can't. I would — but — my reputation ! " She wrung her hands, staring at him, shuddering, huddled against the wall.

" Damn your — reputation," he slowly gasped, looking on her with glazing eyes. " I could see — through it — from the first." His elbows weakening suddenly, he rolled heavily over upon his back.

The minutes crawled past like slow hours. In the room an awful quietude had fallen. Down on her knees Clara knelt beside the dead man. The hands with which she patted his forehead and pushed back his hair were red ; and on her cheek, while she talked and whispered to him of things that they two understood, a crimson smear left by that first spurt of blood had partly dried. He was so quiescent, so still, that the homicidal mania was lulled into tenderness for him — its

handiwork. She hung above the open eyes calling him her Paul, forgetting his sins, and softly repeating that he was come back and would never — never go away from her again. His blood, which had ceased to flow, had crept around him in a broad, dark puddle and her knees were soaking in it.

Around the farther wall, slowly, wherever the furniture cast a friendly, secretive shadow — stealthily, always in the direction of that blessed curtain that gave access to the sane world and friendly human help — Leone, alone with Nemesis and the dead, was creeping. Back to home — back to sweet, honorable life — to Irve, whose lips, though he might doubt, would be locked by uncertainty and a man's care for honor. That whispering bloody Horror on the floor — if it would but forget! If it would be satisfied with its plaything for two minutes — one minute and a half longer! Thirty seconds! Five steps — Then the curtain —

But suddenly the Horror kneeling there on the floor with the dead looked round — sprang up with a shriek of recognition.

"Leone — Leone — I had forgotten Leone."

Swiftly, in her bare feet, in her blood-stained dress, with her murderous red hands Clara drew near and fondled for a moment her white shrinking enemy, — laughing to feel how strong she was, and because the weak thing shrieked and struggled so. She bore it no ill will, she was a mere maniac, whose mania was murder and bloody death.

"See him," she adjured with smiling lips, "my Paul. He won't hurt you. He is my lover. He was yours too, but he came back to me. I found his heart — see, with this. I will give it you; you are dainty and pretty, and — *shriek*, little coward. Your reputation would not let you shriek for him. Shriek — I love to hear you! — Ah, Mrs. Irving Cleworth — so still?"

So still! But all around the sleepers of the Olcott leaped from their beds and shivered in the midnight at the echoes of awful merriment that had seemed to commingle with that cry.

And Clara still laughed, and talked incessantly, and fumbled with her hands in incoherent glee; and thus the inrushing benumbed attendants found her, chattering with the dead.

CHAPTER XXIV

THREE YEARS AFTER

To Chamounix, where the sunsets falling across the everlasting snow paint it with the sublime mountain's memory of the dead and gone sunsets of all ages past, and where the uplifted peaks, rearing their heads in supernal majesty, stand waiting to give audience to all comers — to Chamounix came Belle. She was three years older now, a little over thirty, but she gave no evidence of it whatever unless it was in a new note lurking somewhere in the depths of her beautiful low voice. There was a look in her face that reminded one distantly of the mountains — as though she too looked steadfastly off across the valleys to a horizon that lay beyond the years. But she was not old by any means, any more than Mr. Thompson Werner — stouter than ever in

his knickerbockers and hobnailed boots, his scintillating eyeglasses and gray mountaineer's cap that screened his bald spot from the general observation — was old. Mr. Werner was so aggressively young in fact as to find himself the leading spirit in the small party with which they had been some time traveling. At Chamounix, however, the party had left them and proceeded on its way home, but these two had remained behind to keep an appointment made some time before.

In that rare air — broken but not disturbed by the distant tinkle that betrayed the kine — Belle and her father stood in the roadway at a little distance below the hotel. Mr. Werner was literally balancing himself against one of the public telescopes, through which he was scanning the snow-covered slopes of Mont Blanc for the last party of climbers, who, he judged, ought to be nearing the top by this time.

Belle's mind, despite the running information with which he was supplying her, was intent on other matters, and presently a

growing mellow rumble, rising above the voice of the torrent near at hand, smote upon his ears also, and he released the telescope with a bang and turned to her.

"There he comes, Bella; in a private carriage, by Jo! So anxious to see us he could n't wait for the diligence, I suppose. Well — well, I wonder if he 'll have changed much in three years, Bella."

"Not much more than you, poppa — since you put those knickerbockers on," said Belle, with a flash of her old impertinence. She laughed at the absurd profile he presented, and then the carriage swung into view, and in another moment Cleworth was there, prosperous looking and happy, laughing, talking, returning the old man's delighted greetings, and fighting hard to keep his eyes decently off Belle's face for two full seconds at a time.

The driver, bereft of his passenger but grinning over the fare he had received, was driving slowly on to the hotel above, but Mr. Thompson Werner intercepted him.

"Irve, look here now — you and Bella

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